MODERN
BUSINESS

ALEXANDER HAMILTON
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# Modern Business

A Series of Texts
prepared as part of the

*Modern Business Course and Service*

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Alexander Hamilton Institute

# Modern Business Texts

Prepared as part of the

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1. Business and the Man
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21. Accounting Practice
22. Financial and Business Statements
23. Investments
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[ See list on page V of Volume I ]

# Business Correspondence

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*Modern Business Texts*

VOLUME 14

Alexander Hamilton Institute

New York

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# PREFACE

The writing of effective business letters, like any other art comes partly by practice and partly by study and observation. The object of a text book such as this must be to promote an understanding of the principles of business correspondence. To be successful, letters must produce results, and it is assumed that the executive is more interested in the reasons for these results than in mere forms of expression.

The reader will find the same fundamental thought running thru this volume that he encountered in the Texts dealing with salesmanship and advertising. This should not surprise him since the purpose of letter writing is selling in the larger sense of the term, winning the other man over to our point of view.

In a volume intended for business executives it would be presumptuous to volunteer instruction in grammar and punctuation, but the applications of logic and rhetoric to the needs of business correspondence may be discussed with advantage.

In planning the volume the authors received valuable suggestions from Mr. Robert R. Updegraff, New York; and Mr. S. Roland Hall, Easton, Pa. The counsel and assistance of associates in the Alexander Hamilton Institute, Mr. Dwight E. Beebe,

Director of Service; Mr. Bernard Lichtenberg, Assistant Director of Advertising; and Mr. T. V. Morton, Bursar, is gratefully acknowledged.

We desire to express our obligation to a number of gentlemen who have kindly placed at our disposal correspondence which has been drawn upon to illustrate the present volume. They are Mr. H. N. Rasely, lately office supervisor, The Norton Company, Worcester, Massachusetts; Mr. E. P. Cramer, correspondence critic, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, Akron, Ohio; Mr. Hugo E. Birkner, assistant general manager, The Davey Tree Expert Company, Inc., Kent, Ohio; Mr. R. B. Newton, correspondence supervisor, Wilson & Company, Chicago; Mr. L. A. McQueen, manager mail sales, B. F. Goodrich Rubber Company, Akron, Ohio; Mr. L. A. Selman, Beaver Board Company, Buffalo, N. Y.; Mr. A. T. Hugg, Detroit Steel Products Company, Detroit, Michigan; Mr. David Marcus, treasurer, Printers' Ink Publishing Company, New York; Mr. A. G. Seal, Underwood Typewriter Company, New York; Mr. Tim Thrift, advertising manager, American Multigraph Sales Company, Cleveland, Ohio; Mr. F. M. Barber, Vice-President, John Service, Inc., New York.

CHARLES W. HURD.
BRUCE BARTON.

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# BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE

## CHAPTER I

### LETTERS THAT GET ACTION

1. *Vital importance of good letters.*—The business world's present interest in correspondence affords a striking contrast to its attitude of twenty or thirty years ago. At that time few if any firms strove as so many now do to make their letters "effective." No particular reason for doing so existed, since the amount of business to be transacted by mail was comparatively slight. As commerce expanded, however, the situation gradually changed. Letters began to be more freely used and more was expected of them.

Viewing them in this altered light, business men made a discovery—letters are not merely routine affairs of information and record; they may also be used to *influence custom.* They can sell goods, collect debts, adjust complaints, create that valuable asset known as good will. It is in this way that we shall consider them, as a means of getting, keeping and building business, of increasing and safeguarding profits. A business letter is, in short, a business tool and a business opportunity.

This being so, three practical questions present themselves. First, for whom precisely do the opportunities exist? Second, what is their exact nature and extent? Last, how are they to be embraced?

The chief beneficiaries of more effective correspondence are, of course, business houses. But the individuals in them profit, too. The member of the mail order department who develops "leads" and "pulls" orders in record volume, the collection correspondent who reduces the losses from bad debts to a new minimum, the sales manager whose daily messages keep his field force "on its toes" are marked men in the executive eye. Every job has its possibilities, and letters are one of the most important means of developing them.

These facts suggest the nature of the opportunities. What is their extent? The question may be answered in several ways. It is clear to every one that the growth of business increases the need for correspondence. The larger a business is, the more letters it writes. Every concern uses letters. They are indispensable. A business can do without factories, or stores, or salesmen or advertising, but it cannot do without correspondence.

Business makes letters, but what is more significant for us, letters also, as we found, make business, as witness the great mail order houses and the rapid growth of the direct-by-mail method.

2. *Possibilities for help and for harm.*—If it has not been already sufficiently indicated that a world

of difference exists between good correspondence and poor correspondence, just as there is a world of difference between good and poor advertising, or between good salesmanship and poor salesmanship, the following incidents may do so.

A large wholesale house very mysteriously began to lose business. Only months afterwards did it learn the reason. It seems that the office correspondents had been instructed to make their letters "brief." The instruction, however, was misunderstood by the writers. Not being properly supervised, they took to leaving out of their letters almost everything that required more than a few lines to tell. In this manner information, explanations, and ideas were dropped. The customers were first mystified, then grew angry and turned against the concern. When, however, it had resumed its former spirit of courtesy and helpfulness, business immediately picked up.

Not so long ago a sales correspondent in a large wholesale grocery house, having occasion to consult an old ledger, was surprised to see how many old accounts had been lost. He wondered if some of them might not be won back. With that idea in mind he sent the former customers a pleasant little letter asking why they were not dealing with his house any more. Eighty per cent replied and most of their names were eventually restored to the ledger. The business thus reinstated amounted within three years to more than a million dollars.

The letter is not the biggest thing in the incident.

Still, without a letter, and a good letter at that, there would have been no recovery of the accounts. And only a man who was aware of what a letter can do would have thought of trying it.

A certain progressive house mailing 180,000 letters a month determined to test its correspondence. It had always taken pains to have it correct, clear and courteous, but now it found that only fifteen per cent of the letters—barely one in seven—was even passably good. The least of the reforms it inaugurated, which was to rid letters of superfluous words, effected a saving of $2000 per month.

3. *Business world wants better letters.*—The examples given are perhaps exceptional, but there is no question that the letters of very many houses will stand almost unlimited improvement. Business men are beginning to realize it. This interest has produced a large and growing literature on the subject, and two periodicals. It is also served by an increasing number of specialists writing letters or criticizing correspondence on fee.

4. *Most letters can be improved.*—On account of the attention the business letter is receiving, its character has very much improved. Much harm undoubtedly was done by the early manuals of commercial correspondence which helped to popularize the empty forms, "Yours of the 20th at hand and in reply would say," "Enclosed herewith please find," "Herewith acknowledge receipt of your valued order"

and similar expressions that still roll trippingly off the tongues of too many business men.

These "canned" expressions did no particular mischief at first. At that time little business was done by mail and letters did not have to be "effective." Today, as said, a large part of any concern's business contact is made and kept by them. Every good letter helps a house and every poor letter harms it. That is true of the sales letter, of the purchasing letter, the collection letter, the internal letter, the letter to salesmen, the letter of inquiry, and all the rest. In every good letter there is some promotional or inspirational quality. It accomplishes something, even if that is only to leave a pleasant taste in the mouth of the reader; whereas a poor letter falls short in some essential respect, and is always, if only in comparison with what it ought to be, a source of loss.

5. *Test by successful letters proposed.*—In order to embrace our subject and arrive quickly at the fundamental principles of good business letter writing, let us take three or four letters of different kinds, but all successful. Let us see what they were intended to do and in what way they did it. Let us take a letter written to draw an inquiry, another written to adjust a complaint and last a sales letter. In the course of the volume, we shall consider many more letters of all kinds, but these will suffice for a sketchy and preliminary analysis.

6. *A letter expert's solicitation analyzed.*—The

following letter was used by a letter specialist in angling for clients:

In response to your question I should say that the most important problem that advertisers are facing today—and I refer now to advertisers who employ salesmen—is that of developing leads for their salesmen thru the use of the right kind of business letters.

The time is rapidly approaching when the high-class salesman will refuse to be a door-to-door solicitor. He will refuse to be placed on the same plane as the pack peddler. He is a salesman and his duty is to get in touch with the man who is interested, and show that man why he should buy. His time should be conserved and his ability concentrated on live prospects.

Your good salesman is a temperamental sort of chap and constant cold turn-downs are bound to affect his enthusiasm. You can—with the right kind of letters—prepare the prospect for what the salesman has to say. You can create interest, handle the preliminary educational propaganda and otherwise support the general advertising so that most of the preliminary work instead of being done by a high-priced and expensive salesman is done by the judicious use of the two-cent postage stamp on a well-worded letter.

The letter is particularly interesting because it is about letters and is an illustration of what it prescribes. It was sent out to a picked list of advertisers. with whom the writer had previously, at one time or another, discussed the matter. The very first words rivet the reader's attention: "In response to *your* question." Then come "the most important problem advertisers are facing" and "developing leads for salesmen." In four lines the reader is plunged into the consideration of a problem that confronts him al-

most daily: "How can I make my salesman's costly time count for more?"

Will he stop reading now? He can't! Everything that follows is what he himself believes. He knows it is true. Only where shall he look for the kind of letter that will do the work better than his own? Well, why not to the writer of the letter he holds in his hands? So he does what a very large number of other advertisers have done, he writes to ask further details. And that is what the first letter was intended to bring about.

Note that in all the letter there is not one personal claim. Even the mention of "the right kind of letters" and "well-worded letters" is natural and unavoidable. The writer determinedly keeps himself off the stage and lets the reader have the spotlight. "This is not my problem," he appears to say, "but yours."

The aim of all this is to let the reader go thru the indispensable process of "selling himself." Anticipating just that process, the writer had planned to keep out of the way while it was taking place. If the expressions in his letter had not suggested special knowledge, sympathy and ability, it would have been hopeless to rely upon any mere assertions of competency to do it.

The same thing is true of all other thoughts that might have distracted the reader's attention from his own problem. There is no fine writing in the letter, no jingling phrases, no emotional turns. The

man who reads it writes letters himself; he would be quick to detect a forcing of the interest. If he tests every thought and expression and finds it sound, if after the most critical inquiry he is unable to pick a single flaw, he will have to conclude that a man who could solicit him successfully with such a letter could also write one just as good for him.

7. *Testing an adjustment letter.*—Take an example of a different character, an adjustment letter, sent out by the Norton Company of Worcester, Massachusetts, granting a customer's claim for credit:

Yours January 11
Your order SD–615–C
————Mfg. Co.
Broken Wheels.

Attached is our credit memorandum of January 14 for $7.14 to cover two wheels 14×1×5″ grain 46 grade J, reported broken in our shipment of December 23, 1918, to this customer.

We are very sorry for this breakage and surely appreciate the information given us regarding the condition of the barrel in which the wheels were packed. This will help us materially in bringing the matter to the attention of the responsible persons, with view to preventing a similar occurrence in the future.

What is there in a letter of this sort, aside from the compliance with the customer's request?

Study it. The guide lines at the top help the reader to pick up the sense of the message in quick order. The next paragraph gives a history of the case and makes it unnecessary to go to the letter file

for information, as would have to be done if the date alone of the complaint had been given. Many letters do not even mention that. To provide full details saves an executive's time and patience and makes him grateful toward the writer. That is a good spirit to cultivate in a customer.

The first sentence of the last paragraph of the letter contains an expression of regret. That might possibly be considered perfunctory. But there is also an expression of appreciation for the complaint, and that is not usual, except with very progressive houses. Business men as a rule take no pleasure in complaining or in making demands for credit, and they expect at best a formal adjustment, more or less grudgingly given. Yet it is obvious that when a concession must be made anyway and especially when a good many other concerns would make it ungraciously, there is a point to be scored and valuable good will to be secured by carrying off the matter with good grace, by making the complainant feel that he has done a friendly thing and helped to prevent a recurrence of the damage. The letter quoted has very little to say about "you," but it takes a "you" attitude.

8. *A letter that challenges criticism.*—The letter printed below, to be properly reproduced, should carry four colors and the facsimile signatures of the original. A little imagination, however, will reconstruct it in our minds. It was sent by the Commercial Letter Company of Grand Rapids to a list of advertisers who make use of form letters in circulat-

ing lists of names and who presumably wish to give the letters the appearance of being personally dictated and individually signed. The words, "First," "Second," and "Third," were in red ink, the body of the letter in blue and the signatures in two other colors:

This letter was not actually typewritten. If it were, we would not think of sending it to you. It would mean nothing to you. You could do as well yourself.

But our letters cost only a fraction of a cent each.

Not often do we find time enough to sandwich in a letter for ourselves to the advertising field demonstrating our unusual ability, but when we do, you find

First All the mechanical imperfections are removed. The recipient does not instantly recognize it as a "form." Even the short lines concluding the paragraphs do NOT appear darker than the balance of the letter, or like this.

Instead you find those same short lines just as tho actually written on the typewriter—the same shade, like this.

Second Our mechanical signatures are NOT sunk into the sheet confirming "camouflage," as many that come to your attention, or something like

(Faint facsimile signature)

—but appear authentic even on the reverse side like

(ostensible signature in facsimile)

Third The name filled-in to add that priceless personal touch does NOT appear a sorrowful match in shade to the rest of the letter like (your name). Instead you find a perfect match like (your name).

Now, does not a silent voice tell you why we are always so extremely busy for our customers? That same service is at your command.

In this letter, the letter house set itself the hardest kind of technical test that could have been asked, and

met it with striking success. Moreover, the letter is well composed. It is clear, coherent, complete. Its handling of the old material of solicitation is fresh and imaginative. Then, again, it disarms criticism by not taking itself too seriously; there is humor. One feels attracted toward people who can do so good a job with such an air. The concluding paragraph is piquant. Yet none of these several points are more than contributory to a main point, which is *taking the reader's side.*

Compare this with the letter expert's letter, on page 5. That one studiously repressed all mention of self. This one pins posies on itself. Does that violate a principle of good correspondence?

Not necessarily. The circumstances are different. In the first instance—the letter written by the letter specialist to answer a question in the reader's mind —the specialist had written, "You need better letters." The advertiser would agree. Then he would immediately ask himself, "Is this letter a 'better' letter?" And he would find it so, mainly because it agreed with what he himself thought. His own need would drive him to ask for more information.

The problem before the writer of the second letter was to meet not a mental, but a physical test, and also, probably, the very one a prospective customer would demand. Had the writer rested there, however, had he made his demonstration in an ordinary way, the advertiser addressed would have had no particular occasion for changing printers. There are

other commercial letter houses that can no doubt do as good a job, and as cheaply; then why change?

The effect of a proposition put up in the way this letter puts it up is to make the reader say: "This is a very clever letter. These people know their business. They have ideas. Perhaps they can give us a few new wrinkles." The brag and flourish in the letter give it a slightly whimsical effect. When a house can turn out a job in that fashion, a little latitude of gesture is permissible.

9. *Good letter gets and gives results.*—From this brief preliminary scrutiny we see that a good letter is, first of all, one that *"gets results"* for the writer or the writer's company. It accomplishes the executive purpose, whatever that may be. Necessarily, tho this will be more apparent as we proceed, it falls in with company policies and other aims.

Second, it secures the desired results by promising corresponding *results for the reader.* A good letter shows him it is worth his while to do whatever is asked. It ties the proposition up to him.

Third, a good letter gets and gives these results in an intelligible, agreeable and impressive way. It evokes a feeling of appreciation for the house. It *creates good-will.*

We may sum up the characteristics of this ideal letter by saying in regard to it what has been said of the good advertisement, that, generally speaking, it should contain *what the writer wants to say and what the customer wants to read.* It sometimes may

be necessary to give some people what they do not want to read, but the occasions are exceptional.

10. *The true "you" attitude.*—Seeing the thing thru the other man's eyes does not mean peppering the page with "you's." A bulletin prepared by Wilson & Company for its correspondence department shows the proper attitude. It tells how a French manufacturer wishing to buy machinery in the United States and recalling Wilson & Company by name, without knowing whether or not they made machinery, had addressed them a request for information. Forty days after receiving the letter, somebody in the Wilson & Company office wrote this letter:

*Gentlemen:*

Replying to yours of January 20, just to hand, beg to inform you that we are not manufacturers of machinery.

Yours truly,

The bulletin continues:

"Too bad, too bad," say the Frenchmen on receipt of the letter, "we blush as we read. We sit down at once and write Wilson & Co our regret for the intrusion."

Read again very carefully this letter addressed to France. It is bona fide—one of our own—but no pride is taken in the assertion. What do you think were the feelings of the gentlemen in France who received that letter? They will remember Wilson & Co. as a company that *does not* manufacture machinery. Will they instinctively think of Wilson & Co. when a question is raised concerning packers' products? Would you?

Would it not have been better to have dropped things in hand long enough to telephone the request for information

to two or three of Chicago's machinery companies, and then to have written something like this:

"Your letter of January 20 has come to us today.

"Unfortunately we are not able to give you at first hand the information you desire. We have, however, been glad to telephone two or three of Chicago's largest manufacturers of machinery, whose addresses you will find below, requesting that they send you catalogues and descriptive material covering their entire lines.

"We hope this will assist you to fill your needs quickly and in a manner to merit your satisfaction."

It pays to give what time is necessary to *make every letter a builder of good-will.*

11. *All letters are really sales letters.*—If, then, it is constantly kept in mind that every business letter should be written so as to get business or to keep it, no serious mistakes are likely to be made in correspondence. From this point of view, all letters are true sales letters. The sort of buying letter which handles a supply house so tactfully that it secures a price concession is as much a selling letter as any sent by the sales correspondents. It is the sales attitude that disarms irascible customers and makes satisfactory adjustments. So, too, the diplomatic handling that weans away competitors from unhealthy trade practices is selling, whatever name the letters go by. By a skilful correspondent even a "turn-down" letter may be made to create a favorable impression. Lastly, a letter that promotes loyalty and cooperation within the organization certainly has selling power.

We learned from the Text volume on "Salesman-

ship" that personal selling is accomplished by urging the hearer's mind up the four steps of attention, interest, desire and decision. This is also true of all kinds of persuasion. The use of the formula in letter writing will be dealt with in a later chapter.

12. *Letter should fit the reader.*—It is enough at this time to recall that it is the attention, interest, desire and decision of the reader that are to be considered; not our mind, but the *other man's.* However else the proposition may be framed, it should fit him. In order to make sure it does, we should know the facts. When there is only a name to go by and it is impossible to obtain specific information, then it is all the more important to have a working knowledge of human nature to fall back upon. We may perhaps be able to ensnare attention by a trick or a literary flourish, but we shall never turn it into interest, desire and decision unless in some way we can establish a real connection with the reader's life.

13. *Writer anticipates reader's attitude.*—In seeking to do this, the expert correspondent looks ahead, studies the field, and then, putting himself in the place of the reader, conjures up the sort of proposal that most likely will attract and influence him. The rule is: First find out what the reader wants or might want; promise it to him, if you can; then perform. If you can secure a reputation for knowing and performing, the good-will of your readers will go with it; your promise will then mean something and your letters, whether they are sales, buy-

ing, collection or adjustment letters, will "pull." If you are breaking new ground every time and have no "good-will" to support you, it is of course many times more important that you know the way to the reader's heart.

14. *Importance of learning the principles.*—Letter writing, like every other art, has its fundamentals. We have touched on a few of the more important. The most expert letter writers know the art by these principles, know them most thoroly and apply them with most care. The best business houses inculcate them in their correspondents. As a result of the increased attention which has been given the subject, it has been possible for these writers and correspondents to reduce the element of chance and doubt in letters, and thus in some circumstances foretell results with reasonable accuracy, as, for example, the number of inquiries and amount of orders or collections their letters will produce.

15. *Turning the proposition into a service.*—To sum up, virtually the whole secret of success in letter writing lies in presenting a proposition as a *service.* Anything else that may be added to it will only be an elaboration of this fundamental.

REVIEW

Explain the modern attitude towards business correspondence; also the relation of correspondence to salesmanship.

What is the basic principle of effective letter writing?

Explain the relation of literary correctness to effectiveness.

Would you say that selling sense could be developed? If so how?

What knowledge is most valuable to the correspondent?

How does the writer's mental attitude help or hinder effective writing?

Why does knowledge of the principles of effective letter writing assist a correspondent?

In what sense can a letter perform a "service"?

## CHAPTER II

### SEEING THRU THE READER'S EYES

1. *What is reader's viewpoint?*—Since business letters, to be effective, must be written so largely from the reader's point of view, it is important to know exactly what is meant by this. Have readers a characteristic viewpoint? Do the farmer and the city man see things from the same angle? Is the Southerner's outlook on life and business the same as the Northerner's, or the wealthy investor's that of the hand-to-mouth toiler?

Furthermore, can any reader's viewpoint be always the same? He changes his mind. His feelings go up in prosperous times and down when business slumps. He has fits of being rushed, and times of being poor. He gets worried over his wife or children. He quarrels with his partner, or his employes. He meets losses in business. His competitor steals a march on him. Are we going to put one label on all this?

2. *Viewpoint varies with individual and class.*—The answer, we shall find, is that we cannot. What we call the reader's viewpoint is not a guide, but a reminder. It warns us of the essential difference between seller and buyer, debtor and creditor, employer

and employe, city man and farmer, working woman and society leader, Northerner and Southerner, foreigner and American. It recalls the substantial distinctions of race, intelligence, education, location, position and character of work that must be realized by every business man who would make his letters successful.

Human nature may be the same the world over, but how many executives would write the same kind of a letter to a society woman that they would to a small-town housekeeper? Each section and class has its own preferences and prejudices. A professional correspondent knows that letters to city men should ordinarily be short and that letters to farmers, especially if written between "seasons," may often be long and detailed. He should know that men characteristically like directness, and women deference. The letter specialist's equipment is made up of knowledge of this sort, the result of his experience.

3. *Right viewpoint is vital.*—The difference between a good and a bad business letter is probably just about the difference in the amount of study that first and last is given to the writer's market, the people he does business with. One correspondent writes as he feels—"just talks," he will tell you—and his letters hit or miss according as he happens upon the right idea and the right statement of it. Another correspondent, viewing every letter as a special opportunity, considers, not what he himself feels, but the "other man," with whom rests the decision.

4. *Considering the opportunities for impression.*—Suppose we go at once to the heart of the problem and take up the various kinds of opportunity which a letter presents both for impressing and for not impressing a reader, for pleasing or displeasing him, for winning or losing his confidence, for spurring him to immediate action or letting him slip away undecided. Let us see what the reader wants.

5. *What the reader sees in the envelop and letterhead.*—The first point of contact would ordinarily be the physical appearance of the envelop and letterhead; the reader's glance would find something there which would please, displease or leave him indifferent; and first impressions count for a great deal.

In large business houses, executives, not opening their own mail, do not see the envelops. They do not even see all the mail addressed to them; important letters alone receive their attention. Every business man, however, who sees envelops, is pleased by any evidences of taste, and is repelled by poor paper, crude printing and flashy color or design.

These small matters would count for more with the general executive, or advertising manager, or chief correspondent, than they would with other men in the organization, because the former class consider these things in their own correspondence, and are professionally sensitive in regard to them. Nevertheless, everybody in the degree of his education, experience and natural refinement is affected by them. To

be sure, we do not expect the best, the most expensive or most original stationery under all circumstances. We would think it out of place from our grocer. On the other hand, it would shock us to receive letters from Tiffany or Marshall Field & Company on cheap stock. We are pleased, not necessarily by the striking envelop or letterhead, but by one that is appropriate to the house and the business. If it is either too good or too bad, the inappropriateness distracts our attention from the message.

6. *How printing may affect the reader.*—The same conclusions apply to the quality of printing, engraving and lithography. It is possible to overdo as well as underdo it. The reader may be impressed as much by restraint as by aggressive originality. Some trades, some classes, some houses will stand more liveliness than others.

7. *Quality of typing important.*—Then the typewriting. Is there any question which letter makes the better impression—one that is neatly prepared, or one with the body of the letter in bad balance, with uneven margins, blurred letters, poor spacing, erasures, and, horror of horrors, the reader's name misspelled? Nothing seems so to arouse a reader's wrath as the misspelling of his name. Most of us resent rubber-stamped signatures. Some object to form letters masquerading as personal letters. An illegible signature is an annoyance, particularly if no clew reveals the writer's identity. The expression "Dic-

tated by Mr. —— and sent in his absence" is following the way of other unfortunate substitutes for consideration.

8. *Little factors may decide.*—All these things are by no means vital in the same sense that the message is vital, but in a considerable number of cases they certainly decide whether it shall be read and in a considerable number of other cases, when the reader is on the fence as to the merits of the proposition, they give him just that little jolt that finally topples him over to one side or the other. The same is true of brevity; it is relatively attractive. And if there are inclosures, we may feel about them as we do about the letter: are they neatly printed, neatly folded; do they help?

9. *Reader catches the spirit at once.*—The next thing the reader will ordinarily note in a letter is its tone or spirit. It may take half a minute to reach the message, but before he reads a dozen lines he gets an impression as to whether the writer is civil and helpful, or whether he is throwing dust in the reader's eyes. A reader may be stopped at the outset by a word that excites his displeasure. He may consider the writer as too familiar in addressing him as "Dear Mr. Jones," or as curt, coarse, or supercilious. Mistakes make it harder to obtain a consideration of the message on its merits.

If, on the other hand, the reader encounters no cause for irritation, he will read on without being conscious of the fact that he is being guided and may

feel a strong inclination to do what he is asked to do. It is not exactly true that "it isn't what you say, but the way you say it" that counts. Nevertheless, the way is certainly important. There is nothing we may want to do, which it is right for us to do, that cannot be seen and stated *from the other man's point of view.*

10. *When the tone is helpful.*—As an example of this we may take the following form letter, which explains itself:

Our New York representative has just informed us that you are now building a new home. I therefore write to ask if we may be of service to you in executing any necessary treatment that may be required by the trees on your grounds. Your landscape architect will no doubt recommend some changes in the landscape plans in order to accommodate the grounds to the new buildings.

The success of landscape architecture depends primarily upon the results of the planting that is done and the preservation of the existing natural beauty, especially the trees, which are the real features of the landscape, and without which no great beauty can be secured.

It is of vital importance that the landscape problems be approached with this idea in mind—that the trees and new plantings are fundamental. No matter how beautiful the design may be, nor how artistic the first effect, the final result must depend upon healthy, luxuriant foliage.

You can build a new house, new walks, and new drives. You can make new lawns and plant new shrubs and flowers. But you cannot replace your priceless trees, should they be lost in a wind storm as a result of physical weakness due to decay or as a result of the bad effects of filling and excavating without the proper precautionary measures.

No millionaire can replace the ancient spreading oak or the stately elm by any amount of expenditure. These are heirlooms of years, and years alone can replace them.

On the other hand, trees in a place such as yours may be rendered almost imperishable by proper care and for that reason you should go into the matter of your trees most seriously.

We should be glad to serve you and work in conjunction with your landscape architect to the end that if it is necessary to fill around certain trees we will probably treat the trees to insure their health and longevity. Our sole purpose is to preserve for you the natural beauty inherent in your priceless trees.

In order that you may know more about us and our work, I take pleasure in having our educational booklet sent you in the attached envelope. This will tell in an interesting way the story of the Davey Organization and the satisfactory character of our service. It is of real interest to all estate owners.

May we arrange to have our representative meet you or your architect on the grounds to advise with you concerning the welfare of the existing plantings? The courtesy of your early reply will be greatly appreciated.

"Why should I think about the trees?" was probably the mental attitude of the man who received the letter. The letter tells him. It is all true. There is no statement in it to which he cannot assent, which he probably does not already accept. The letter assembles a number of pertinent facts and points out their significance. He will be a hard man to convince who does not realize that after spending thousands of dollars for his home and grounds he may well spend a trifling fraction of that cost to preserve the beauty of them. The letter is straightforward, courteous, candid, helpful. Tho confident, it is modest. Any curiosity one may have as to the company is satisfied by the accompanying booklet.

11. *The spirit that provides facts.*—The business man who is asked to spend money on new equipment likes to know that it has paid others to do so. He appreciates facts like these which help him to make up his mind:

Here is a dollars and cents reason why it will pay you to use Fenestra windows when you rebuild your mill.

The Hupp Motor Car Company of Detroit, Michigan, employing over one thousand men, found that after moving from their old factory equipped with wood sash into their new building equipped with Fenestra, they could reduce the working day from *ten* to *nine* hours, while still maintaining the same amount of production.

You can figure for yourself the annual saving in workingmen's wages that such results effect. One thousand men working on, say, such a low wage scale as thirty cents an hour, save their employer one hour of time each day for three hundred working days. The total figure reaches

$90,000.

The Factory Manager of the Hupp Company was called in and asked if Fenestra windows represented to him *five minutes* of additional daylight during the working day. He replied that this was an absurdly low rating for the added light they received, stating that the difference was much nearer an hour or an hour and a half per day. However, on this very low basis of five minutes per day gained in light, figuring thirty cents to the working hour, it was found that this company had made a profit, at the end of the year, of 135% on Fenestra over the original purchase price.

Our Little Rock representatives—Clippard Builders' Supply Company, 121 North Louisiana Street—will gladly tell you more about Fenestra and show you how economically the windows can be installed in your building.

A critic might complain that the second and third

paragraphs, even if true, claim too much for strict plausibility. Plausibility, however, is a relative matter. The house's reputation has something to do with it. At any rate, the letter was a successful one.

12. *More need for candor than finesse.*—Correspondents of little experience often assume a need for great diplomacy in handling readers. Veteran correspondents, on the other hand, are more and more relying on a straightforward statement of the facts, given, of course, in a courteous way.

An important bank in a large city found it necessary to inform a number of its depositors that they were carrying too small a balance in their checking accounts. The situation might be thought to be a somewhat ticklish one, because the depositors were mostly women, society women, too. The vice-president of the bank felt, however, that they would think twice before taking offense at a courteous statement of the situation. This is the letter he wrote:

We believe that some of our depositors have not considered the fact that it is necessary for an account to have an average balance sufficiently large to cover the expense of carrying it. Careful analysis proves that from accounts in which there are maintained average balances of from $300 to $500, sufficient revenue is derived to approximately cover the cost of keeping them.

We are calling this matter to your attention, feeling that you would not knowingly want to have your account continue on a basis which is unprofitable to the bank, and that you will now desire to increase your balance at least to a point where the account may be carried without loss. Please do not, however, gain the impression that we do not desire

your account, for we are most anxious to continue the pleasant relations of the past.

May we not have an expression from you on this subject?

The woman who read the letter realized, perhaps for the first time, that she had not been "patronizing" the bank, but had actually been a source of loss to it. That it had not been mentioned before was a tacit compliment to her and that it was mentioned then in so tactful a manner was hardly less so. The record shows that the letter not only strengthened the old accounts, but also produced new ones.

13. *Proposition is the heart of the letter.*—After the general appearance of a letter and its tone have made their impressions on the reader, or while they are doing so, he is taking in the point of the message. What is he asked to do? And why should he do it? No matter how attractive the stationery, or pleasing the style, or friendly the tone, it is not likely that he is going to comply with a request unless there is a substantial reason behind it. The request or offer and what it amounts to—together these make up the *proposition,* or what, in short, the letter *talks about.*

If it is a sales letter, will the article or service offered to the reader save him money, time, effort? Is it better or cheaper than anything else on the market? What assurance of satisfaction is given?

If it is a collection letter, what reason is there for paying now rather than later, or at all? Why should he regard payment as urgent? Will it help his credit? Will it injure it to delay? Can he avoid

payment? Too many collection letters are bare reminders, or beat around the bush.

It is still worse when there is no real message at all. Thousands of letters are sent out for no good reason. Some houses have a habit of "keeping in touch with the trade," regardless of whether they have anything to say. Of course, even a pleasantry should have some excuse. Business men resent being required to give attention to meaningless trivialities.

14. *The better the proposition, the better the letter.*—Obviously the better the proposition and the more clearly its benefits are explained, the more certain its acceptance. It is strange how this manifest truth is overlooked by many correspondents, hypnotized by the theory of the "magic phrase." Over and over again we see outwardly commonplace sales letters get wonderful results. This is not strange if the propositions are attractive. It is self-evident that if we take pains to offer our customers what they want, our letters will not have to throb or sparkle.

Doubtless it is true that the stronger the proposition the less the care that need be given the presentation. That would be a poor reason for neglect. Many a good proposition has suffered from being only half told. A hardware dealer is quoted as saying that a tool manufacturer had sent him $30 worth of stationery, printing and elevated language without getting any of his business, whereas an occasional cheap postcard with propositions and prices on it

would have made him feel a lot more like giving the writer a trial order.

15. *Presentation carries a heavy responsibility.*—The proposition in a letter may be naturally attractive and the essential facts all there and yet the presentation be so poor that the reader does not understand it. It may argue, without giving facts. It may be so long and involved as to weary a reader, or so brief as to leave him in doubt. It may explain to a farmer in terms that would interest only the city man. It may talk in a $15,000 tone to a $1500 man, or the reverse. It may not fit his dignity, social position and intellectual status, or his town, section or state. It may displease by faulty spelling, grammar, logic. A right or wrong presentation, in short, may make or mar a proposition. It is as important as the tone of the letter and nearly as important as the message itself.

16. *Talking the reader's own language.*—Of these several considerations regarding the presentation, none is more important than that of talking to the reader in the language he understands. Take, for example, the following letter sent to a list of physicians by a collecting service:

*Dear Doctor:*

Isn't it very probable that while you are debating what to do about Mr. F.'s account, Mr. F. is settling the matter quite comfortably by spending the money at the garage, or the theater, or the tailors?

And letting you wait?

Of course he intends to pay you—eventually—but he thinks you won't mind waiting a little longer. His line of reasoning is ingenious. "The doctor," he argues, "has a good practice and doesn't need this money half as badly as I do just now." So the doctor goes without.

He doesn't realize how unbusinesslike his attitude is, for he doesn't look upon medical service as a *business transaction.* Consequently he is shocked and offended when he gets a curt note from your attorney telling him that "we shall be obliged to adopt legal proceedings." Compulsory methods of collection have never proven profitable to physicians. Legal threats do little else but breed ill will and produce lawyer's fees.

Mr. F. is human. *And it takes a knowledge of human impulses to get action out of him!*

That is why the physicians listed here employ SERVICE. It has practically wiped their ledgers clean of overdue accounts. For it leads the patient to a prompt and *honorable* settlement.

Your accounts need just such intelligent handling. And you will send them today, on the inclosed Data Sheet, if you are really and vitally interested in getting your money and *keeping your patients.*

Nobody but a man who knows some of the troubles of doctors could have written that letter. The power of it, the initial shock, is largely, it is certain, in the presentation. How much duller and hence less effective it could easily have been!

17. *Art of choosing the commonplace.*—At the same time, it is not always or necessarily the dramatic touch that carries the day. Some propositions must be presented very seriously and conventionally. Probably the letters that achieve the most remarkable results are to the unimaginative eye, as already sug-

gested, the most utterly commonplace. The power of accomplishment consists in fitting the proposition to the reader's need and *showing* him that it fits, as the following case illustrates:

We are sending you the inclosed booklet at the suggestion of one of our Worcester investors, with the hope that it will be the means of interesting you in Madras Marble, with which prominent citizens of Worcester have become identified.

These persons have invested in Madras Marble because they are convinced that it is a safe investment and one that will earn large profits, and because they feel assured that these earnings will continue for many years to come. They also found that the management of the Company was worthy of their confidence.

Among the directors of the Madras Marble Company are Mr. J. E. F——, vice-president of the G. A. F—— Company, Paul Building, Worcester and 131 S. Street, Boston, and Mr. J. F. A ——, 12 Beachmont Street, Worcester.

We are glad to extend to you the privilege of looking over the same facts and figures which so convinced these men that the element of risk had been eliminated and such large profits assured that they were led to become identified with the Company.

We suggest a careful reading of the inclosed booklet.

The investors on the select list of names to which this letter was sent knew the gentlemen mentioned in the letter, and their reputation. The statement that the company would earn large profits therefore had a substantial probability in their eyes, and they were inclined to go further and ask for the facts and figures. No amount of argument, description and least of all smart writing could have made the letter

stronger. Its very restraint was strong. Most letters sent out by banks and the better class of promoters are of this conventional character.

18. *It pays to say just enough.*—The principle of saying neither too much nor too little, and saying it in the right way may be further illustrated by the experience of a dairy farm in the East. A letter of 900 words in length had been prepared to send to a list of 2,000 people, but instead, by advice of a letter specialist, the following dozen lines were mailed to a selected list of 600 New York City people known to be willing to pay 20 cents a quart or more for milk in the days before the war, when ordinary milk was only nine or ten cents a quart:

*Dear Madam:*

We have added to our herd of Jerseys a herd of Ayrshire cows, which will be kept separate. The milk from these cows will contain about 4% of butter fat. This milk we propose to sell for nursery milk. Chemical analysis will be made of the same monthly and the report mailed to you.

The Jersey milk will be sold as heretofore, and tests from 5% to 6% butter fat.

The price for each will be as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Two quarts daily. . . . . | 20 cents per qt. |
| Three quarts daily . . . . . | 18 cents per qt. |
| Four quarts or more daily . . | 15 cents per qt. |
| Single quarts. . . . . | 25 cents per qt. |

To understand the success of the letter, which made a market for the whole of the increased output of the larger dairy herd, we must put ourselves in the place of the families to whom it was sent. They were city

people, alive to the necessity of having the best milk and aware of the name and reputation of the dairy. To these people, the special attention shown in addressing them and, still more, the high price of the milk would be sure to suggest special care in its production and handling. The statements as to chemical analysis and tests for butter fat would deepen the impression. There was nothing more to be said about the milk or the Ayrshire cows or the dairy that would have added a pin's weight in convincingness. The letter told all that mothers and fathers wanted to know to decide them as to making a trial.

19. *Timeliness a little appreciated element.*—The fact that the letter just quoted was in both proposition and presentation appropriate to the class of readers and to the circumstances is not the whole reason for its success. There is an additional reason and it reveals a further point of contact at which a letter can win or lose—the point of timeliness. These letters sent to 600 New Yorkers were mailed in the city at 8 o'clock at night and were delivered on the first mail in the morning, so that they came up for breakfast table consideration when both father and mother, baby and milk, were in conference and the chances for getting a favorable decision were at the maximum.

The matter of timeliness is one which may be of great moment to a reader. An offer, for example, that would interest a house while it is in the market gets no thought the day after buying. A reply that comes several days after it is expected may fall flat

in spite of the excellent proposition it may contain. Untimeliness makes many letters tiresome. Lastly, a style of letter that produced handsomely last year may be altogether out of date this year. The taste in letters changes as it does in other things.

It is an interesting fact that the chances of business-seeking letters in downtown New York and probably in all large cities are increased by mailing them to reach their destination in the afternoon. The reason is that a business man devotes the first part of his day to considering how he can make money; he looks for orders, sales reports, collections. In the afternoon he is ready to consider spending money. The same letter that would be overlooked or sidetracked in the morning might after luncheon get special attention.

The bond department of one of the largest trust companies of the country sends out 100 letters a day to a list of 1200 banks, reaching each bank fortnightly. Each letter consists of a special offering of securities, "all or any part, subject to prior sale." There may be four, five or six securities mentioned, according to the supply. Full details are given in the brief manner of bond houses. The bonds and the standing of the house are eloquent of character, but a very important reason for the large business done in this way is that the letters are timed to arrive at the banks on the morning of each bank's discount day when its board of directors is to decide how much of the bank's money it shall lend out locally and how much it shall have

left over to invest in securities. The trust company's letter, dated the day before, appears in the pile of papers before the chairman and is acted upon.

All progressive houses endeavor to handle their correspondence in the briefest possible time. In many organizations the rule is to have all letters answered within twenty-four hours. Letters received before 10 o'clock must be answered the same day. If information cannot be obtained for a letter at once, then prompt acknowledgment must be made and the information must follow at the earliest moment.

20. *Increasing use of telegraph and special delivery.*—The last point of contact between the message and the reader would be the medium for the letter. This is nearly always, of course, the mails. There is, however, an increasing use of the telegraph, of "night" and "day" letters, for sales, collections and other errands, where urgency is called for and an especially forceful impression desired.

There is controversy as to how far one-cent postage may be made to do the work of two-cent mailings. There is no question that for most important purposes a two-cent stamp is better. Many business houses have incoming mail sorted by "first class" and "other mail" and the executives see only the first kind. Experience alone will tell what letters may be entrusted to the one-cent stamp.

Special delivery letters are very commonly used for collection purposes, and by some writers in special cases for sales letters.

21. *Summing up the factors.*—Summing up, we see that there are not one or two, but several, important factors in the success of a letter and that when the more important ones are not strong and in some instances, no doubt, even when they are strong, nevertheless the success of the letter may be defeated by minor considerations, such as poor appearance, weakness of introduction and by coming at the wrong time. But the most important factors, as we have seen by putting ourselves in the place of the person who in each instance decides the fate of the letter, are its tone or spirit, the proposition it contains and the manner in which the proposition is presented. These will now be considered in turn.

### REVIEW

How would you group the various points of contact with the reader that a letter affords?

How do these points of contact afford opportunity for pleasing or displeasing?

Which point of contact is the most important? Which next? Which least?

Apply the test to your incoming mail. Check up the various things that please or displease you and see under what groups of contacts they fall. See if you can tell why you did or did not do as you were asked.

Apply this test to your own dictated letters of the past few days and see if you can imagine what impressions the readers received in general and also as to particular points of contact.

Apply the test to the next letters you write. Does it suggest any means of improving your letters?

## CHAPTER III

### THE SPIRIT OF THE LETTER

1. *Letter must not be sordid.*—"Business is business" is not a good motto for the correspondent. The truth is, there is a deal of sentiment about money-making. Few men are in business for financial gain alone, or even primarily. Business for them is a means also of living, of self-satisfaction, of self-expression. As for most men and women, only the sharpest of economic spurs can keep their minds fixed on the dollar. The dollar is one of the things that counts with our readers, but only one. It would be a mistake, therefore, to dwell exclusively on that and ignore all the other possible motives.

2. *When the writer forgets his manners.*—Not very often, but too often at that, a retail dealer will receive from a manufacturer a letter like this:

> This is the third letter we've written you. We can't understand why we haven't heard from you. We've got the goods—you know that—and the price is right. We've shown you that you can turn your money three times over on —— while you're turning it once on some of the "also rans."
>
> There's a big chance right now for the live ones and we're getting them. Why not belong? Order while the supply lasts. Do it today. Do it right now.

Why should the dealer answer an offer? His silence will indicate that he does not wish to buy. To demand a reply is impertinent. The letter, in short, is as offensive as it is weak. When a dealer pays any attention at all to such a message it is because he knows the house's goods are better than its manners. Many dealers would not buy at all.

3. *Rushing the inquirer.*—Let us take a less extreme example. Suppose we had read a magazine advertisement of a memory training course and had been interested to the extent of sending in a request for information. The advertiser's reply begins:

*Dear Friend:*

You have made a wise move in deciding to commence the study of memory—a move that you never will regret. From this day you will be a bigger man mentally. You will always feel that you have made a decision that will have a life-long effect on all you say or do.

Presumably the advertising and the letter are aimed at "the man whose education has been very, very limited," to whom, the letter says, "the course is indeed a true salvation." Possibly such would find this introduction attractive and stimulating. If they do, enough said. But there are many others who would experience a decidedly unpleasant reaction on reading it. They would feel that the advertiser was, as our boyhood slang had it, "too previous." "Dear Friend"—we are being pumphandled and grow suspicious. The suspicion is deepened when we are told that we have "decided to commence the study of mem-

ory," whereas our interest is purely tentative. To be told that we would "never regret the move" and "from this day be a bigger man mentally," etc., arouses mixed amusement and resentment. We get a mental picture of the writer with his foot in our door and a solemn gesticulatory arm reaching thru it.

If, with a letter writer's sophistication, we assume that this is merely sales strategy—poor or good, according to the field and whether or not it produces—we pass over it entirely and go on to the description of the course, the claims, the evidence and the proposition. But the temptation to sniff is there just the same, and many readers would never regain confidence after having once lost it. "If that course can only be sold by rank flattery and glad-handing, count me out," they would say. And this, in spite of the fact that it may be a very good course, after all.

4. *Mishaps may make good letter ring false.*—The opening of the letter just quoted was, if not certainly poor, at least dubious. Here is a letter of a different sort from another publisher:

> We were mighty glad to get that little message from you, telling us of your interest in ——'s Course in —— ——. We appreciate this opportunity of showing you a few of the good points and the first portion is going forward to you under separate cover for you to look over fairly and freely at our expense..
>
> I want you to know right now that we are going to take a real and personal interest in helping you to profit from this Course to the fullest extent. We do not deny that we

are anxious to have you continue with it and put Mr. Blank's ideas into successful operation; but first of all we want you to be absolutely satisfied in your own mind that the —— will be worth to you in added profits many times the $5 a month it costs you.

The tone of this letter is much superior to that of the other. It seems and, so far as it goes, actually is a good one. But its effect on one particular reader was the reverse of good. This reader had expressed an intention of taking the course and had asked the amount of the discount for cash. Instead of getting the information which would have clinched the sale, he received the above, betrayed as a processed "form" letter by the poor matching of name and body of the letter. "We are mighty glad to get that little message from you"—how did that read to the man who had not subscribed, but had asked a specific question about price? Did it smack of sincerity and heartiness, as intended? Did the reader have confidence in the "real and personal interest" that was promised?

The incident is exceptional. In most cases, the letter would have answered all demands on it. We must call the spirit good. If we had no special reason for criticism, probably the fact that it was a form letter would not be held against it. We would not feel as warmly towards the writer as we would if it had been a personal letter, but we would consider that he "had a heart" and we would overlook the cold calculation. It is only when something goes wrong and exposes the hollowness of a conventional pretence that

a bad impression is made. Can this be entirely avoided? Perhaps not. It will help, at any rate, to remember that for all practical purposes the tone, spirit, intent or motive of the letter is *what the reader finds it to be.*

5. *The letter that helps.*—Now, suppose you were a lumber dealer handling "Beaver Board" and received from the Beaver Board Company the following letter:

Did the thought ever occur to you that you might sell an additional room—complete—to a big percentage of your customers?

It is being done successfully by other dealers in towns near you and we feel that you, too, could work up a big field of sale under the same plan.

You will find that among people who own their own homes there comes sooner or later the need for extra room —a sleeping room, a playroom for the children, a den or sewing room, a billiard room—which wasn't put in when the home was first built. You can take advantage of this in interesting these people to buy good bills of material.

Most of them won't either build or remodel for some time —yet they all represent prospects for an additional room. To sell them, you will find in many cases, it is merely necessary to make the suggestion.

To help you do this we have prepared special folders and a good newspaper cut, either or both of which should bring you good returns. Copies are attached. Even if you don't advertise your general lines we believe you will find it worth while to do something special in selling "additional rooms."

What do you say? If you haven't this material already on hand, make use of the space below and tell us what to send.

What would you think of it? Here is a sales letter

that makes no attempt to sell you more stock, but instead suggests a method by which you can get more business for yourself. It has worked the plan out for you. All that is necessary for you to do is to take the last step of placing the advertising in the local paper, or mailing out the folders. How is it possible not to appreciate a plan devised and a letter written in such a helpful spirit?

6. *Collection letter with a good-will rider.*—Suppose, again, that as manufacturers, we had bought steel from Hogan & Son of New York and had neglected to pay promptly for it. How would we feel to get a dun of the following kind:

> You have plenty of bills of your own to collect, and you know how good it feels when a man pays up promptly; how you feel like doing him favors.
>
> That's the way we have always felt toward you, and we want you to let us feel the same way this year. We want you to pay your overdue account now, before it gets any older.
>
> Won't you go to your bookkeeper, and say:
> "*Send a check to Hogan today.*"
>
> Thank you.

Would we not pay up quickly? Would we not say: "I'd like to know that fellow. I'd like to do more business with him."

Is it not worth while to know how to write letters like these last two?

7. *Harm that poor letters do.*—No business man, of course, sits down deliberately to write unpleasant letters, but in his haste he sometimes dictates curt or

careless ones, and these may be just as effective in spoiling business as if he had given his best attention to being offensive. To learn how to embrace every opportunity in the letter to satisfy and please the reader, how to eliminate all causes for friction, how to write always in a spirit promotive of good-will, is an executive art that compels "results." We can refuse a favor with such consideration that we keep our friend, or we can make an adjustment or grant a credit in so grudging a manner as to kill all hope of future business.

8. *How spirit of letter is important.*—Is the letter truthful? Is the writer sincere, candid? Can we have confidence in his statements? The questions come up, consciously or unconsciously, in our minds, whenever we receive an important letter. We are entitled to facts, to the truth and the whole truth of the matter, but many times we can judge of the quality of the facts only by what we know of the character of the writer. A man's integrity makes it easier for everybody to deal with him. It is natural, therefore, for men, when they are not dealing with established integrity, to study the tone of a letter that has interested them and to read it forward and backward to see if it "sounds right" to them. And since people do it, the letter writer should keep the fact in mind.

9. *Using facts with discretion.*—In insisting on the importance of truthfulness, sincerity, simplicity, as factors of success in a letter, it is necessary to remind ourselves that this means intelligent truthful-

ness, intelligent simplicity. It is possible to tell the truth out of place, to tell it unnecessarily, to raise questions that need not have been raised.

The following letter, for example, printed on handsome stationery, was addressed by a well-known educational expert to a list of 150 wealthy philanthropists:

I am taking the liberty of sending you today under separate cover a copy of my new book, "——," which has just been published by the —— Company.

While fully realizing that you are very busy, I am convinced that no one connected with large affairs can fail to be interested in any effort, however humble, to improve educational facilities in general and to increase the opportunities of the rising generation for self-advancement. This is my reason for now trespassing upon your kindness.

My book, which is the fruit of many years' experience in the practical training of young men and women, has been written with the design of making it possible for the student, with its help, so to increase his mental power and grasp as to fit himself for better things and increase his value to the community. I know that much of the matter it contains has been helpful to young people all over the country and I am hopeful that the lessons in their present improved form may be of real assistance to many more aspirants for the success that comes thru rightly directed effort.

If you can find the time to look over the book and will be good enough, if it meets with your approval, to let me have a word or two voicing your opinion, which I may be at liberty to use publicly, I shall esteem it a personal favor.

The letter was a failure. Every one of the wealthy philanthropists addressed has a secretary, whose duty it is, among other things, to weed out the begging,

favor-seeking and relatively unimportant letters in his mail. Probably the letter quoted reached none of those to whom it was addressed. It was suppressed for the obvious reason that it asked them to go to considerable trouble for the mere purpose of letting the writer cash in on their names and reputations.

How unnecessary to raise the suggestion of trouble or favor. The philanthropists would know that any endorsement of theirs would probably be used. It was not essential to say anything, much less to write 200 or 300 words of justification, about it.

Suppose instead the writer had said:

> Knowing your interest in philanthropic work, I am sending you this volume on ——. I believe it will help you in doing more good.
>
> If you know of any one else for whom I could do a like favor, kindly let me know.

The gift, the compliment and the brevity of the note would all place the philanthropist under obligation to the writer and there being no direct request for anything, it is probable the philanthropist's secretary would bring the letter to his attention. What more likely, then, than that he would glance thru the book and return the writer a pleasant word or two?

10. *Answering inquiries in the right way.*—Sincerity has many shades. A letter that answers the questions of an inquirer in the order of interest or importance to him is certain to create a good impression. There is something wrong with the price or the proposition that needs camouflaging. It should

be needless to say that the proposition must be right before the tone of the letter can be right. The spirit and motive of every letter should be transparent. Too clever, too diplomatic, letters arouse a suspicion as to the sincerity of the writer and the character of the proposition.

11. *Meeting the demands of courtesy.*—Granted that the letter should be truthful and sincere in spirit, it should also be courteous. Courtesy, like sincerity, is an elastic term. There are certain accepted standards of behavior to which we all seek, or should seek, to conform. To many the conventions make an exaggerated appeal; they are more sacred than what pass for their religious beliefs; but each of us feels that he must be treated with "proper" respect; we expect a certain degree of deference, and people who solicit our patronage must offer us that. It is astounding how much of it some of us can absorb.

12. *Spreading it on thick.*—Two or three years ago in New York a certain society paper, now defunct, sent out the following subscription letter to a thousand people:

May it please Mrs. Johnjohns to accept this brochure in evidence of the esteem in which The —— is held by the great personages of Europe and the representative newspapers in the United States.

An invitation to become one of its subscribers accompanies this letter and the information is given that The —— is issued each month and that the subscription is twelve dollars a year.

May the publishers hope to receive Mrs. Johnjohns' ap-

proval of their motive in bringing The —— to her attention and to count her among its subscribers?

Most of us would set this letter down as stilted nonsense, but there is more to it than that. The writer's object was to flatter the vanity of his reader by adopting what she would doubtless think a "very refined" tone, and he achieved it. The letter was very successful.

13. *Keeping the temper even under provocation.* Courtesy is one of the first laws of successful letter writing. The experienced correspondent never permits himself to write impatient or "nasty" letters, even under the greatest provocation. No complaint is so unjust that it should not, for the good of the business, be handled with consideration, even indulgence. It is occasionally necessary, where there has been imposition, to bring a correspondent up with a round turn; and in some collection, possibly in some sales, letters, it may be advisable to take a vigorous tone in order to extort a reply, but this need involve no infraction of courtesy, the aim being purely to shame or shock the reader into right behavior, and not to wound his self-respect.

14. *Persistent courtesy carries the day.*—A well-known shoe house tells how it recaptured an important lost account by good tactics. After the account had been given up by the office, the sales promotion manager took it in hand. In the course of a year he wrote nineteen letters from as many different angles, beginning with a frank admission of possible error

and ending with an intimate personal letter in longhand. To each letter the only reply was silence. The twentieth letter consisted of just two words. At the top of the letterhead were the address and salutation; at the bottom, the word "sincerely," and the signature; in the middle of the sheet—"Thank you."

The offending retailer, altho he had been deaf to argument and appeal, could not endure the gentle sarcasm, justified as he knew it was and carrying an imputation of discourtesy on his part. He broke silence, apologized, listened and was won over.

To conclude from this that it was the last letter alone that worked the conversion would be wrong. That letter was effective chiefly on account of the nineteen that preceded it. The rebuke that was accepted in a humble spirit after so many letters would have been found impertinent after only two or three. The other letters had built up in the mind of the retailer a new conception of the manufacturer. Stubbornness, or possibly a curiosity to see how many letters the house would write, made him hang off as long as possible, but when the last word had been said, and that still courteous, he gave in. He is today one of the house's biggest and best customers.

15. *Taking the wind out of the blusterer's sails.*—One large concern has used with success a form letter written to meet the situation created by the irascible dealer who scolds the house's representative and refuses further business dealings:

Your frankness recently with our Mr. Salesman is appreciated, for we always welcome constructive criticism.

Mr. Salesman tells us that you spoke candidly concerning our shoes. We respect that candor and we want you to go further, if you will. It will be a real help, if you can find the time to tell us in just what respect the shoes fall short. Your experience as a dealer makes your judgment worthwhile, and we want all the suggestions we can get.

Thousands of other dealers are satisfied customers of years' standing. We want you in that list.

The letter rarely fails to draw a favorable reply.

16. *A good letter improves relations.*—Neither should courtesy be overdone or seem a matter of obvious routine. Letters of too formal civility, letters that give themselves airs, letters that seek to humble or wound by exaggerated politeness, have no more place in business than the angry letter. The only good letter is one that improves existing relations. This is a good thing, too, to remember in dealing with subordinates.

17. *To avoid talking down to readers.*—Many a manufacturer injures the chances of otherwise good letters to his trade by talking down to it. The customer, no matter if he does only a neighborhood business, does not feel any real inferiority to the big manufacturer, and does not enjoy having the latter's importance thrust upon him. The retailer who sees a distributor's salesman possibly once or twice a year or buys the distributor's goods thru a jobber may not relish a letter that is headed "To *Our* Dealers." Why not "To Our Dealer Friends," or just simply "To Dealers," letting the tone of the letter show the friendliness desired?

"If more big houses would get the humble spirit of being a source of supply to the dealer instead of that arrogant spirit of 'We-are-a-great-big-company-and-you-are-our-dealer'" says one executive, "they would find that they would be on much better terms with their trade."

18. *A lesson from a patronizing letter.*—Here is a letter written by the advertising manager of a somewhat exclusive department store to a list of women whose names were taken from a "blue book":

For your convenience we have opened a charge account on our books under your name.

There is no further formality to consider, and your orders will be filled promptly, without delay of any sort.

If you have "shopped" carefully enough to pass judgment on the prices of such items as those on inclosed leaflet, you will quickly verify our *extremely conservative* claim that "you never pay more at * * *." (We prefer to say it that way usually, but if you have compared prices in the leading city stores you will know how much more it really means.)

We shall welcome our first "charge" order from you—and possibly the enclosure herewith may suggest to you the very thing. If it does, you might put our store service to an immediate test by asking Central to give you Hope 1212 and order what you wish—or a postal card or letter will be just as effective. We deliver to your home free.

Promptness, accuracy and courtesy are part of our promise—and complete satisfaction with your purchase is the rest of it.

The letter brought no response.

Read it over. It starts off, "For your convenience," but right there the "you" attitude stops. The rest is little short of patronizing. "We have opened

a charge account on our books under your name"—a condescension. "No further formality"—hurry up and buy! "If you have shopped carefully enough to pass judgment"—"Upon my word!" the women readers exclaim.

The letter was rewritten and in the new form produced excellent results for several years:

> We would appreciate the privilege of charging any purchase that you make in this store and trust you will afford us the opportunity to do so.
>
> An account will be opened in your name if it is agreeable to you. It will not be necessary for you to make application at our office, but simply to order your selections "charged" either in person, by mail or 'phone.

Some little strategy was used in the mailing of these letters that was not used in the former case. They were written during the week, but were dated Saturday and not mailed until 8 P. M. that night. On Sunday the women of the city read the department store advertisements in the Sunday paper and arranged a shopping tour for Monday. Monday morning the department store letter arrived in the first mail. Question: Which department store were these women sure to visit that day?

Timeliness does not wholly account for the letter's success. In the second letter the store put itself into the background. It is the customer's convenience and not the store's convenience that the reader is invited to consider. The store asks the privilege of making shopping easy. The letter is brief and agreeable.

It gives no occasion for misunderstanding or resentment. It recalls all the good impressions the customer has of the store and helps to offset any possible bad ones.

## REVIEW

Can you identify the spirit or tone in each of several recent letters you have received?

How do you distinguish the spirit from the proposition, or the presentation?

What gives the spirit—good or bad—to these letters? Can you tell in each case whether the writer dictated as he first felt, or made a careful revision afterward? Can you "spot" the natural courtesy, the insincere flattery, the sham enthusiasm?

Which would you consider the more practical way of improving the spirit of your own correspondence: memorizing a list of pleasing appeals, or studying the other man's viewpoint? Why?

Why not both?

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SPIRIT OF THE LETTER (*Continued*)

1. *Letting correspondents sign letters.*—The best practice nowadays is for a correspondent to sign his own name and not merely that of the house, and also freely to use "you" and "I" or "we" in the body of the letter. Objection is sometimes made to this, chiefly on the ground that by being direct and natural the correspondent may become too friendly with customers and be able to control the accounts. Hence, with these upholders of the old order, the house is always "it"; and the correspondent is the "undersigned" or the "writer." There is all thru their correspondence a general air of indirectness and aloofness.

This is widely recognized as the exact opposite of the proper attitude for companies, especially large companies, to take. Customers must not receive the impression that they are dealing with a "soulless corporation"; this consideration far outweighs the danger that house correspondents may carry away business with them if they leave.

2. *Beware of dull letters.*—And dull letters—think of the fabulous wealth lost because of them! Next in point of inefficiency after letters with poor

propositions, letters that make you guess what the propositions are and letters that give offense, rank those that are stupidly uninteresting. Business men look upon them with dislike. Let a house or its correspondents once get a reputation for writing such letters and their mail will go headlong, unopened, into every waste basket.

It is very easy for a man who writes many letters to fall into a rut and dictate the same kind of a letter over and over again, hundreds of times, without substantial change and at length, too, without life or interest. He may be aware of the growing dulness in his letters, and yet be unable to freshen them up. At first, experience shows, he will think the fault lies in his diction. He will pick up new words and expressions and seek new angles of thought. He may start re-reading the old literary masterpieces for inspiration.

3. *Cure for dulness.*—These helps are not to be despised, but they are all superficial compared with the real medicine, which is to know the reader and how to serve him. This and not smartness, nor even pure English, is what the latter wants. If a letter is helpful, he simply cannot find it uninteresting.

Naturally, it is not so easy to write this kind of a letter as it is to reel off the phrase: "Yours of the 11th to hand and in reply would state." The letter one is answering has first to be read, perhaps read "between the lines," and the writer, his business and personality seen with the mind's eye. The proper point

of contact will then almost automatically suggest itself. "What does this man want? How does he like to be talked to?" The questions will seldom offer any difficulties if we get acquainted with him.

4. *Specialists take time to think.*—A successful specialist in letters says that when he has a series of letters to write that may bring him several thousand dollars in fees, he spends weeks lying around in apparent idleness, adjusting his mind to the market, visualizing its members and trying to put himself "inside their skins," so as to realize how they would think and feel on the proposition he is going to put up to them.

With such a fee he can of course afford to take all that time. The ordinary correspondent or executive, bound to write many letters a day, cannot afford it. All the same, it is vital to face the fact that the secret of a good letter is just this special thinking and personalizing of the customer. Every one who hopes to be a good letter writer must make use of the principle to the utmost.

5. *Interest breeds interest.*—It is a courtesy to appear interested; every reader responds to it. If a business man's letter does not interest us, the inference is that we do not interest him. He may have wanted our money when he wrote the letter, but he did not care anything about us. He was merely doing his day's work, holding down his job, thinking about himself.

This is natural. At the same time it fails to warm

us up toward him. He does not care and so why should we? We do not think of philosophizing over his letter, as we are doing here. We simply toss it away, and a minute later, perhaps, give a wholly disproportionate amount of attention to an oil stock promoter whose proposition we do not dream of considering, but whose friendly phrases ring pleasantly in our ear. It is not so hard to cultivate an interest in our prospects if we begin by trying to think what they look like.

6. *Humor has its dangers.*—The business man, as a rule, does not like facetiousness or buffoonery. There is a big place in letter writing for real humor, but let us watch our step! Most writers will probably think it is better to be safe than sorry. Let us be individual, personal, original, by all means, but unless the sacred gift of humor is natural to us, it is better to leave it to others and confine ourselves to the sober but not unappreciated work of providing constructive ideas.

7. *Letters that are "different."*—A good half of the struggle to write letters that are "different" is due to a mistaken conception. Nine times out of ten the letter that is praised for this quality, is not one that is merely "snappy" or "clever," but one that *explains*. The inexperienced writer jumbles his ideas, is careless about their order and hence fails to make the most of them, while an old hand will take the same facts and ideas, spread them out naturally, as a man would talk, emphasize the right ones, and make

it impossible for the reader to see the proposition in any other way. The tone of one letter will be altogether different from the other. The difference, however, is not in word juggling, but in clearness and directness of appeal.

8. *Right and wrong way of handling salesmen.*— While we are considering the matter of spirit, let us compare two letters to district sales managers taken from a correspondence bulletin of Wilson & Company. The first reads:

Your sales of —— for the first period of this year have not been very good. You sold 3842 lbs. less than you did for the same period last year. You sold only 42% of the amount set for you by Mr. —— as the amount of —— you should sell during January.

Your —— sales were somewhat better. You exceeded by 16% the mark set for you by Mr. —— and you had a gain on —— of 1837 lbs. This certainly is fine.

Let's see you bring your sales of — up to a figure such as you have reached in your —— business. It is quite important that this increase in the sales of —— be made.

You understand, we believe, that Mr. Wilson has requested that the —— business be doubled this year and in order to accomplish this it is necessary for each Branch to sell the amount of Products that has been set for them by their District Manager.

Talk this matter over carefully with your salesmen, letting them know what a really big job we have on our hands. Let each one feel that he is personally responsible for a certain portion of this increased business.

Your men should feel encouraged at the way they have boosted your —— business, and we believe it will help speed them up on the —— business.

If you put this increase up to your salesmen in the way of a personal obligation, we believe you will have no trouble in securing your amount of —— business.

The other letter:

First of all—here's congratulations on your —— sales. A gain of 1837 lbs., or 16%, is going some. Now, then, it's up to you to do at least as well with ——.

The first of the year Mr. Wilson asked us, "Can we double our —— business this year?"

Knowing our organization, we did not hesitate to answer, "We certainly can and will." So you see, it has become an obligation on the part of each of us.

Do your salesmen know that in January you sold 3842 lbs. less —— than in the same period last year, 42% only of the amount pledged for you by Mr. ——?

Take them into your confidence; they will join you in being ashamed of that showing. Let them know just how big a job you have on your hands. Make each one feel his personal responsibility. They'll do their share, we know, to put us "across."

Comment is hardly necessary. The reason for the marked difference in tone is plain. The correspondence bulletin attributes it to a difference in personality, and there is such a difference, but the secret of the difference is probably to be found in the two viewpoints. One writer is considering the feelings of the district manager and his salesmen, and the other is not. One explains in the language of friendliness, coöperation and loyalty and the other in veiled threat.

9. *Small power in "peppy" and "high-brow" letters.*—It is not wise to strive for too much "pep." If a writer cannot measure up to the standard he sets, his talk is heavily discounted by his men. If, on the other hand, he does so, they say he is "differ-

ent." Plain naturalness, helpfulness, friendliness, go further than "ginger" talk.

Bookish, academic, professional letters do not "register" with plain people; such letters may impress but seldom move them.

10. *House's own record helps its letters.*—It is in the right spirit to give your reader a good character in your mind, to assume and make it clear that you assume that he is just, fair, generous. Doing this early in your correspondence may do away with any necessity for a test of it.

It is needless to say that such an attitude must be sincere. A house cannot carry on business in loose fashion and then suddenly break out in high moral indignation over a grievance with any expectation that the display will impress those who know its record.

The best concerns are scrupulously considerate in their letters, not only of their trade, but of their competitors as well. They realize that their letters come into rivalry with other letters and hence ought to measure up favorably in spirit as well as in matter. Telling tales on competitors and criticizing them are poor recommendations for the writer of a letter. The best atmosphere in which to do business is one of fairness and bigness.

11. *Readers have hearts as well as heads.*—The way a letter is read and the spirit the reader finds in it depend on what the reader thinks of the writer.

Often, too, it depends on more. Very few propositions are decided by sheer logic. With most people the reasoning faculty is weak. When they are to make a decision, it must be thru the imagination and feelings. A vast amount of business is done almost altogether on friendship; connections thus made are maintained as long as the confidence is deserved. New concerns always find it difficult to get a hearing from some prospective customers even for better goods. We all hesitate to break old ties.

This gives the letter writer a sound reason for not stopping at bare courtesy and perfunctory interest, when occasion permits infusing something of warmth and friendliness into the message. There are many times, of course, when this would be out of place and it is only too easy, when we do not feel warmth, to make a bad job of trying to express it.

The readers of our letters do not expect us to wallow in sentiment or be unduly familiar, but they like to think of us as humanly interested in them and eager to give all possible help. Everybody is sentimental about himself and his work; the biggest men most of all, or they wouldn't be big.

12. *When business comes second to life.*—This is especially important to keep in mind when writing to customers in the Southern states, in South America, Europe and other places where life is regarded as a fine art and business as a subordinate part of it. Experienced letter writers cultivate the closest relations with such customers, manifesting a lively interest in

their health, their business and their families. Occasionally, if the connections extend over some period, they may send little presents for the children.

To obtain the best results, letters to these countries or sections must have this friendly tone. The desirability of putting it into letters sent to other localities is, if we only realize it, hardly less. Progressive business men try to make friends of all their customers, wherever located. One well-known house keeps what it calls a "Bertillon record" of each client's likes and dislikes, whims and foibles, and thus is always able to make a letter fit like a glove.

13. *Taking a real interest in the reader.*—Very often what we mean by "human interest" is simply interest in us. A writer in *Printers' Ink* tells how a young woman revolutionized the method of handling complaints in a large mail-order house. The prevailing method had been something like this:

*Dear Madam:*

Yours of the 29th instant received. We are sorry that you could not use waist No. 22–M–1253, and are herewith sending our check for the price you paid, including postage, $5.24.

In nearly every complaint, the young woman found a clew as to what the customer might want. She thought it worth while to follow this up, with the idea of pleasing the customer and if possible saving the order. The letter she wrote read as follows:

*My dear Mrs. Grant:*

I have spent long cold winters in the country myself and

I know just how you feel about the waist (No. 22–M–1253), which you are returning to us.

That material is rather sheer and thin for the cold winter climate of your great North Dakota. And because I know what a great convenience it is to have some one on the spot to study one's needs, I have personally selected a waist which I believe you will like. It is No. 22–M–1258. You will find it illustrated on page 99 of our catalog—the page opposite the one on which the waist you are returning is shown.

This blouse is made of a good weight crêpe de chine—which is not transparent like the Georgette crêpe you are returning, yet is similar in style to it, is almost the identical cut except for a slight difference in the finish of collar and cuffs, and has the same smart little black velvet bow at the neck. It comes in your color selection also, and the price, like that of the other, is only $5.

But, as you requested, we are sending you our refund check for waist No. 22–M–1253, and have included in it the postage you paid both ways, $5.24.

We regret that you have been put to the inconvenience of having to return the blouse, and hope that your next order will be wholly satisfactory—as we endeavor to make all orders.

Please accept every good wish for a glad holiday season.

Most sincerely yours,

Letters like this are selling letters, while letters like the first might as well be called "unselling" ones.

"Any fool can sell a man once," says Hiram Abrams, the moving picture producer. It takes brains and heart to keep him sold. Friendship and helpfulness are, after all, the least expensive kind of system to operate. They involve more pains at first, but they save trouble in the end and they pay wonderful dividends.

14. *Welcoming the new account.*—Most houses welcome a new account, but too often the welcome is a filled-in form merely acknowledging receipt of the order; a wholly bloodless sort of thing. A few houses see an opportunity in the occasion, as the following letter shows:

> You are cordially welcomed as a new customer of the Lunn & Sweet Shoe Company. We appreciate your order and thank you for it.
>
> To say merely the pleasant word is not enough. We wish you to understand that the traditions of this House involve something more than the opening of new accounts, more than the filling of initial orders, with perfunctory "thanks."
>
> It is our policy, our determination, to serve our dealers and to make a *new account* a *permanent account.*
>
> We ask you to remember just this, that Lunn & Sweet Shoe Company is at your service, always.

After a short time the sales manager sends a second letter like this:

> Did the shoes reach you O. K.? How did you like them? Is there anything I can do for you?

Such letters build good-will. In this case they are continued for several months with each customer until the relation becomes a permanent one.

15. *Feeding out helpful ideas to the trade.*—When it is possible to devote considerable attention to correspondence, many houses find it desirable to send items of trade news, gossip, helpful suggestions about buying or selling, or office short-cuts, or to call the attention of their customers to interesting or im-

portant articles in trade and general publications. With many houses it is a correspondence policy not to write any letters of a routine nature without putting into them something of this constructive character. Letters of this helpful sort naturally find a welcome in the trade. They win good-will and respect for the house which sends them. They lift the relations of the house with its customers and prospective customers above the level of the purely mercenary and place it on a solid basis of recognized service and cooperation.

16. *Best service to explain the proposition.*—But, after all, the greatest service that the individual letter, at any rate, can perform is to illuminate its proposition for the reader and show him what he can get out of it. Everything else is subordinate to that. The merit of the following subscription letter sent out by an advertising journal is that it provides ideas for the reader. The principle is really only that of describing the goods and their utility. In this case the goods are not articles of fixed value, but sales ideas. There is no parade of friendliness, but the act, whatever the business motive behind it, is essentially a service and is so felt. The letter, which was written a few years ago, is in part as follows:

> The story in the current number of *Printers' Ink*, telling how the Ford Motor Company is pushing its salesmen to sell a car a day is a remarkable demonstration of sales-forcing.
>
> It will be an eye-opener for any manufacturer.

The forcing is done thru bulletins to salesmen, which are quoted at length. These bulletins are fighting for a big stake—500,000 cars this year.

"Ginger" is too weak a word to use in describing their effect on the salesmen. They are a galvanizer. They should be pasted in every manufacturer's scrap-book as models of this kind of thing.

How Procter and Gamble, Packard Motor Car Company and Other Firms Use Branches for Special Purposes.

In this article a most interesting inside glimpse is given into the methods that these big firms use in connection with their branch offices. For instance, Procter and Gamble use their New York branch to stimulate by its competition jobbers elsewhere thruout the country. Packard has its own special ways of handling a branch, and several firms are quoted in their own words. If you have branch offices, try this article on your next director's meeting and see it bring a reaction.

How Society Brand Clothes Won Distribution Without Salesmen.

In an authorized interview, Alfred Decker, President Alfred Decker and Cohn, explains how his firm got a host of new dealers. The very concrete facts about results will interest every advertiser who is searching for a way to broaden his market.

There are over a dozen good articles in this issue. All of them are concrete in their suggestion, and every one of the articles is going to help some manufacturer who knows how to adapt ideas to sell more goods.

17. *Thinking for the dealer.*—The Beaver Board letter, printed on page 41, reflects a condition which confronts many other organizations, but one which

not all are shrewd enough to handle in the same able way. The company explains this attitude and its policy in connection with it as follows:

We deal almost entirely thru the lumber dealers, most of them handling a very heavy volume of business during the year. Beaver Board is only one of many items which they carry in stock and their sales on this one item in comparison to their total volume of business, you can appreciate, would not justify their spending fifty or sixty per cent of their time on Beaver Board sales.

Consequently, when we go to our dealers with suggestions which will increase their sales of Beaver Board, we do not go out with heavy broadsides and startling figures and statements on the unusual business which they can develop on Beaver Board if they but take close advantage of the cooperation which we are able to extend to them.

Rather, when writing the trade, we subdue somewhat Beaver Board as a specific item and offer them material and suggestions for increasing their general sales. This eliminates entirely the possibility of the dealer taking the attitude that we are trying to force him to spend more than the justified amount of time and energy on our proposition. We find on the contrary that he is genuinely appreciative of these practical suggestions and helps for increasing general sales and is perfectly satisfied that Beaver Board should be mentioned prominently in the material which we send him for this use.

This is just a step along the line of appreciating the dealer's actual needs and problems and approaching him in a broader and more effective way.

18. *"Listen, agree, oblige."*—An advertising man, H. N. Casson, has said that the "three magic words of personal salesmanship are *listen, agree, oblige.*"

They are equally good for salesmanship on paper. They illustrate the right spirit in a letter.

## REVIEW

What gives the best tone or spirit to a letter?

Why do the best letter specialists "take time to think?" Are they thinking up clever phrases—or doing something else?

What is the "something else?"

How is it found?

How far can you put it into an ordinary letter?

What is an ordinary letter?

What is the value of a letter that influences. How much pains is it worth while to take in writing such a letter?

## CHAPTER V

### THE PROPOSITION IN THE LETTER

1. *Proposition is distinct from its presentation.*—We have seen that a distinction is to be made between the nature of a proposition and the manner in which it is presented. If a proposition were always plain or if the bare statement of it could be relied upon to give precisely the right impression to the reader, there would, of course, be no need for elaboration; proposition and presentation would then be one. As this is seldom the case, it is necessary to consider the two separately.

2. *Good proposition may have a poor presentation.*—The distinction being admitted, it follows as a matter of course that a letter may contain a good proposition and yet bungle the presentation of it. Take, as an example of this, the following letter sent out by a high-grade house of furnishers and decorators to the presidents of a number of banks and business houses:

A telephone call will bring to you promptly *some one* who can tell you how to solve the problems of refurnishing your office.

This some one has an *organized force* behind him which contains architects, designers, space experts, a purchasing

department, a cabinet factory, building superintendents—an organized force geared to take care of your wants, whether you desire to remodel a building, a floor in a building, or to have the space to be occupied by any of your departments scientifically planned.

Maybe you only need a new desk or chair, and don't know where to find it—(*we* do!) or, a room redecorated.

This means that you may get practical suggestions for the asking, and if you then think it wise to do so, you may unload the whole job on us, be it much or little. This is personal service.

The proposition here is for a specialist to take a furnishing job off the hands of a bank or corporation officer. It looks like a good proposition, one for which it would not be difficult to make out a case. But the letter failed to do so. We see why. Bank presidents have no time to bother with small details. They do not telephone for decorators on the spur of the moment. Even if these were mere subterfuges and all that was hoped for was that the officer might pass the letter down to the superintendent or office manager, still it fails to show any good reason why anybody should take an interest in the subject, unless, to be sure, it was on his mind at the moment. There is no presentation, practically. What was needed was information and suggestions. Suppose a folder or booklet had been prepared containing details of service, limits as to possible usefulness, names of satisfied clients, and illustrations of some of the bank and business office interiors, furnished by the house. If this were presented to the officials with a plausible excuse for reading it the

chances for success would have been greatly increased.

3. *Poor proposition may have good presentation.* We may also have a poor proposition, but a good handling of it. This is illustrated by a letter sent out by an automatic typewriter company to comb the field for inquiries which were to be followed up by salesmen. The "proposition," needless to say, is not the typewriter, nor the plan, nor the terms of purchase, but the suggestion made in the letter, as follows:

> What day will it suit you to see our Mr. Blank and have him show you the results of direct advertising as accomplished thru the automatic typewriter?
>
> We have many valuable letters on this subject and will be glad to exhibit them upon request to those interested.

Since this letter produced replies from more than 80 per cent of the concerns to which it was sent, we must assume that it was successful as an inquiry-bringing letter. But as it turned out that none of the concerns answering were interested in buying an automatic typewriter or had in fact thought of doing anything more than looking at the lot of "valuable letters," we also conclude that the replies were not worth getting.

What, then, is wrong with the letter? We cannot say it is the presentation, because that is courteous and friendly. Nothing can be clearer than what the proposition means. It is the latter that produced the large percentage of inquiries and it is the latter, therefore, that is responsible. If the quality of the

inquiries is poor, there is a simple explanation for it. While the writer of the letter meant to sound a list of business houses on the extent of their interest in an automatic typewriter, instead of asking, "Do you want to know about it?" what he really did was to ask, "Do you want to see some valuable letters?" He regarded the two propositions as practically identical and thought he could get a show of hands on the question of interest in the typewriter without actually putting the question flatly and running the risk of scaring them off. That sounds like poor logic, but lots of business men do the same kind of thing, over and over again.

4. *Both proposition and presentation good.*— After this experience, the typewriter manager rewrote the letter from the other angle. Instead of tiptoeing around the idea of possible interest in the new machine, he introduced it with a bang. His second letter illustrates a good proposition well presented:

> We have an automatic typewriter that will produce in quantities the same letters as your daily mail.
>
> It feeds the paper into the machine—
> Fills in each name and address—
> Makes changes in the body of the letters—
> Does not require constant attention.
>
> Added to this, the letters can be signed to give a personal touch.
>
> Would you like to know more about it?

Thirty persons out of a list of 400 answered that and 12 of them subsequently gave orders amounting to $12,000. As the previous letter had gone out to

a list of half the number and ignominiously failed in the practical business of getting productive inquiries, we may roughly set down the difference in efficiency between the two types of letters at about $6,000. It was worth that to get both proposition and presentation right.

5. *The proposition defined.*—By "proposition" a business man generally means an offer, or a settlement of terms. "Well, that sounds all right," he may say to a salesman. "What's your proposition?" That is, "What are the price, terms of payment, etc.?" But he often gives the term a broader significance, as "That's a good proposition," meaning that it is a useful, profitable, satisfactory one. As used in logic, the term signifies the formal statement of a judgment.

Any of the definitions is satisfactory for our purpose, and so we may take proposition to mean the idea, excuse or reason for writing a letter. It may be an offer or suggestion or definition of utility, as in a sales letter; a grant of credit, in a credit letter; the adjustment in answer to a letter of complaint; or a mere courtesy or pleasantry that is being passed along—a statement in the barest terms, we may say, in order to distinguish the proposition, as *we* see it *before* writing it, from the presentation, which is the way the *reader* sees it *after* we have written it. The proposition, when it gets on paper, with various reinforcements and embellishments, becomes the presentation. As to a presentation and proposition being

the same, the last typewriter letter is an illustration of that; it is bare statement; the whole letter is the one proposition: "Would you like to see a machine that does so-and-so?"

6. *Proposition is all-important.*—From all this it is apparent, as we found in a previous chapter, that the proposition is by far the most important part of the letter. It is the part on which most thought must be bestowed. It must be considered for its effect on the reader. If it is weak in its first conception, it must be strengthened.

7. *Proposition grows out of conditions.*—From the fact that no one can write an effective business letter when he knows nothing of the business involved, the addressee, his circumstances, the trade customs and the like, it is evident that a proposition, to be sound, must grow naturally out of such conditions, both those inside and those outside of the house, and fit into all the different needs of the business. To be of greatest value to the house it must reflect its policy and spirit and also that indefinable something which for lack of a better word we call "atmosphere." It is possible for a letter specialist to make an interesting presentation of a proposition in the field of his own experience, but if he is in a field of which he has no intimate, first-hand knowledge, his letter, if written "out of his head," may be not only ineffective but positively harmful.

Business men in different fields must often be handled in radically different ways. A proposition

to make retailers pay for dealer-helps might be accepted in one line, and arouse resentment or amusement in another. Again, it would be possible to work up a wonderful presentation of a proposition to cut prices on some article, but the proposition itself might be all wrong, and the campaign suggested might run counter to the policy and best interests of the house. To be sound, the proposition must be consistent with every other feature of the business.

There would be little use in dwelling on a point that is obvious to most readers were it not for the widespread belief in the superior magic of deft phrasing, and another equally widespread belief that it does not make much difference what you say if you just say it naturally or write as you talk. These two delusions stand in the way of better letter writing. The way to get rid of them is to know the truth.

8. *Conditions are needs of house and customer.*— The conditions and customs which govern the transaction of business and hence the handling of correspondence may be expressed as the needs of the writer or his house, and the needs of the reader, who is a customer or a prospect.

The house's needs relate to buying or manufacturing, the needs of the market, competition, general trading, business and employment conditions, etc. The methods of meeting these needs are governed by house policies. It is evident that every proposition must be in harmony with house policy, must be ad-

justed to the business and the campaign. From the house's point of view, a good proposition is one that combines the two interests, the house's and the customer's, so as to make them as nearly as possible identical.

9. *Good writer knows these needs.*—It is therefore indispensable that a house correspondent should know the house policies and all the various elements and details of the business embodying them. He should know the house's goods; the goods of competitors, also; buying sources, raw material, trade conditions. The more he knows about them, within limits, the better; not in order that he may load down his letters with unnecessary information or technical terms, but so that he may safeguard the company's interests by not making unbusinesslike propositions, and also give its customers the benefit of his special knowledge as required.

In addition to this he should of course know his market and the kind of people that make it up, this also necessarily involving a knowledge of human nature in general.

What a reader wishes to know about an article, for example, in order to make up his mind as to purchase, is, in the first place, whether it will fill a need; second, whether it has quality, value, durability; then, possibly, style or design; afterwards, price, terms and service. Information on these points makes up the proposition. The appeal or power of a letter is in

these things, and the best use that can be made of paper, ink and presentation is in setting the power free.

10. *Power generated by meeting customer's needs.*—A company running a line of omnibuses in a certain large city felt that it would need the help of the public to obtain an extension of its franchise to new territory. It accordingly prepared a small map showing the route extension desired and had copies given out to the passengers in its coaches. They were asked to write name and address on the map and hand it to a conductor. A large number did so. To these, a short time afterwards, the company sent the following letter:

> We thank you for the endorsement of our extension program, which you expressed recently by signing a folder similar to the inclosure.
>
> Now comes the most important step in the movement of helping us to help you: The Board of Estimates and Apportionment must be urged to grant the applications of the —— Coach Company now before it, and a personal letter from you to them, stating your reasons why this Company should be permitted to make its service more extensive and useful, could hardly fail to have its effect.
>
> The widespread enthusiasm with which our announcement has been received leads us to suggest this additional step in your interest.
>
> Very truly yours,
>
> Please write today to
> Board of Estimate and Apportionment,
> City.

Twenty-five hundred people wrote to the city board

and the extension of the coach line was granted.

Now what was the reason for the letter's success? Plainly, nothing but the character of the proposition. If the company had asked the public to come to its help, a proposal that would have been entirely different in character, the appeal would have failed. When it pointed out, however, that the matter of service was the public's own concern and that the public had it in its own hands to help itself, the public lost no time in doing so.

11. *Power declines with repetition of proposition.* A manufacturer wishing to speed up the members of his traveling staff sent their wives samples of a new article for women that was to be added to the line and asked them to try it and tell their husbands what they thought of it. The letter scored 100 per cent in results. As before, the power was in the proposition. "Won't you tell your husbands how good you think this is?" The wives accepted the request as a compliment.

It would have been different if the request had been commonplace, or had been repeated. A second, third, fourth letter of the same kind, would have shown a great decline in power. To keep up results, either the proposition or the presentation must be made stronger.

12. *Good proposition needs little help.*—Merchants and other business men become so skilled in the art of going to the root of a letter that they are not often deceived by the ordinary little artifices used

to make a proposition sound better than it really is. In writing business men, if not everybody else, the best rule for a writer is to lay all the cards on the table, provided, of course, that the proposition itself cannot be improved, and that is the first consideration. A letter may be poorly written, it may violate all the rules of logic, rhetoric and grammar, and yet be highly successful if the proposition is a good one and the presentation truthful and courteous. The better the proposition the less do we care how it comes to us.

One of the chief reasons we hear so much about the magic of word-weaving is that it is not easy to find propositions that are exceptional. There are more good things than ever, but they get more and more alike. It is easy to show benefits, but harder to show superiorities. This itself is cogent testimony as to the supreme importance of the proposition.

13. *When proposition needs bolstering up.*—But suppose that the proposition as first conceived is a very ordinary one and the writer is not sanguine as to his ability to present it in a way that will be likely to overcome the reader's indifference. Suppose that the letter is a sales letter and that the price of the article in question is the same as competitors are asking, that the quality is no better, and that there is, in short, no special reason for asking the customer, who, we will say, is a retailer, to buy at once.

If the writer's house has no special standing with the trade, if he has no record of service, no personality, no saving grace of humor and kindliness, such

as would naturally attract readers to him and make them give him the benefit of their choice, he must either rely on getting only the small proportion who will give their order to the first or last one who asks, or else he must strengthen the proposition for a wider and deeper appeal by putting some sort of an inducement in it.

The first obvious inducement is to reduce the price or increase the quantity or the quality. One or another of these things can be done, but it is not wise for that purpose alone. A better plan is to offer an inducement in the form of business-getting advertising ideas, and this is a common practice. Good window display material, display rack or case, electric signs, cash trays, counter ornaments, advertising novelties to give away, unusual printed matter to distribute, premium coupons and certificates, all have been used in a thousand and one forms to put life and energy into a colorless proposition.

14. *Trying out a proposition.*—What is a good proposition? There is only one thing that proves it —results. Business men and correspondents learn by experience what kind of propositions appeal to their customers. When form letters are used, the "pulling power" of the list is gauged by a system of tests, made in conjunction with analyses. The test is to send out a few letters to a small list first and keep a record of the results. If the results are not good, the proposition, or more frequently, the handling of it stands condemned and must be changed.

Every form letter, no matter how brief or inexpensive, going out to a considerable list, should receive a try-out. There is no reason in the world, except lack of time, why every campaign of any importance should not get it.

When the campaign is very important, business houses elaborate the test by sending out several different drafts of the same letter; some under two-cent and some under one-cent postage; and sending them to different sections of the country. Thus a line is obtained on the quality of the list as well as of the letter. If the letter produces satisfactorily on a small scale, it will be sent to the whole list. If not, it is changed and retested.

15. *Proposition determines the kind of letter.*— As the character of the proposition is more or less determined by the conditions in the business, so the proposition in its turn more or less determines the kind of a letter which shall be written. Some articles are so popular that it is necessary to do no more than soften the price or terms in order to interest almost everybody. If, for example, the price of Ford cars were to be dropped to, say, $200, payable at $10 a month, the manufacturer could use any city directory for a mailing list and get wonderful returns. A letter of bare announcement would do it. When, on the contrary, the article is little known, it is obvious that the proposition should be made all the more attractive.

16. *The higher the price, the better the reasons.*—

Most propositions are made, not born. That is, they rarely are exceptionally attractive at first thought. There are few positive bargains to be had. The higher the price goes, however, the more need of demonstrating advantages. It is not difficult to take ten-cent orders by mail, and only a little harder to sell at 25 cents and 50 cents. Above $1 a good deal of explanation is ordinarily necessary to establish confidence and secure action.

There are exceptions, due to prestige of record or big indorsements, but ordinarily it takes an exceptional proposition to secure an exceptional price. People do not part with their money on mere request; there must be a sound reason. The more money they are asked to part with, the better the reason must be, and the more space it will probably take to prove it. When we come to propositions involving $10, $50, $100 and more, the writer has to be very explicit and convincing.

17. *Length and cost of letters raise difficulties.*— The effect, however, of increasing the length of the letter often is to limit the chance of getting a favorable decision on the proposition, because many people shy at long letters. They do not always do it. Over and over again it has been proved that long letters will be read if they are interesting enough. The difficulty is to make them interesting. And long letters, requiring extra postage, are expensive. Where the argument is printed and illustrated in folders, or booklets, and especially if the proposition is a high-grade one, the

cost may be very great—15, 25, 50 cents and more a mailing.

Shall we send this expensive matter out broadcast? No matter how carefully the names on the mailing list may have been secured, whether they were bought from list brokers or especially compiled, there is certain to be a large percentage of names which will not respond, the exact proportion varying with the character of the proposition. A list may be excellent for one proposition, and poor for another of almost the same kind, this being due sometimes to differences in the character of the house, or in the nature of the presentations, and sometimes to differences of time or season: people may have bought, or just then be without funds for the purpose.

Obviously, therefore, every list should be tested in order to save the precious material; possibilities should be sifted to find probabilities or true prospects.

18. *Raking the list for prospects.*—How is this to be done? It may be effected by the simple expedient of "raking" the list with a tryout letter which aims at inducing the reader to write for further information. It is a sort of litmus paper test, that automatically reveals the good prospects and excludes the 70, 80, 90 per cent and more who are not interested in it. To these self-selected ones the writer sends the expensive material, secure in the knowledge that it has reached the hands it was intended for and that he has saved hundreds or thousands of dollars by his strategy. He may have to send several more

follow-up letters in order to exhaust the probabilities, but he will not be "going it blind"; the percentage of response to the first letters will give him an inkling as to what he may expect to obtain from succeeding attacks.

The method is precisely the same when prospects are sifted out by letter for salesmen to call upon.

Important as the principle is, comparatively few business men outside of those habitually engaged in direct advertising campaigns recognize it. Most experienced houses test both their letters and their lists, but many others do not, and the neglect to do so is a source of loss as well as of uncertainty regarding the right methods to be used in letter campaigning.

## REVIEW

What is the relation of the proposition to the other elements of a letter?

If a proposition is naturally weak, how may it be strengthened, both intrinsically and artificially?

What bearing has the "service" idea on the proposition?

What proves the value of a proposition?

How can the value be tested in advance of complete proof?

In what way does the nature of the proposition determine the character of the presentation?

# CHAPTER VI

## THE PROPOSITION ANALYZED

1. *Propositions of three kinds.*—Besides applying to the proposition the practical test of preliminary try-outs, we may also subject it to a logical analysis. Every proposition, we find, belongs in one of three classes:

(a) Some aim to secure immediate action, as to buy or sell.

(b) Others aim to induce the reader to ask for further information.

(c) The aim of the last type is merely to impress, inform, amuse, or, best of all, help.

To illustrate by sales letters: the first class of letters aims at *orders;* the second at *inquiries;* the third is generally educational and promotional; for example, making announcements, as of new prices, new styles, or salesmen's visits, and may be called *good-will* letters.

2. *How selling and "rake" letters differ.*—The differences in purpose naturally lead to differences in character. The letter designed to convince and sell at once must necessarily go into considerable detail. The inquiry-seeking letter merely outlines an idea.

In the selling letter we give the reader all the elements for a decision. In the inquiry-seeking letter we hold back most of them in order, when an interest is expressed, to explain them adequately.

The suppression of detail in the second type of letter does not mean, however, that there is no proposition in it. In this type, as well as in the order-seeking type, there is a specific proposition. The immediate selling proposition is: "You ought to buy this desirable article at this price, because," etc. The inquiry-seeking proposition is: "You ought to ask for more information about this interesting matter, because," etc.

The second proposition is not strictly a selling one, but the reader must be "sold" on it just the same. He must make a decision. It does not involve sending money, but it is a step toward it. The proposition consequently must be attractive enough to induce writing. Enough must be told to arouse curiosity and possibly desire for the article. Something must be promised: an opportunity for possession, gain, or enjoyment.

3. *Proposition in "good-will" letters.*—Instances of the first and second types of sales letters are given elsewhere and we need not illustrate them here. The third or "good-will" class would, of course, be sent almost exclusively to regular customers. The proposition in each case is: "You ought to know this" or "You will be interested to know this"; the reason being given or not, as seems necessary.

The grounds for asking a man to do even no more than keep something in mind, should, we repeat, be the benefit to him. Even when he gives in the name of charity or friendship, the real motive is always pleasure, pride, or a sense of justice or compassion, and this is the target at which to aim.

4. *Applying the test to a sales letter.*—Let us apply the analysis to the following letter, typed on handmade paper, beautifully engraved, and sent to a large list of business acquaintances:

*Dear Brother Smith:* An announcement reaching you under separate cover will inform you of a change I have made in the advertising world. From the manufacture of sporting goods, I have jumped to the production of commercial art.

The Blank Blank Company, Inc., of which I am now Secretary, is composed of men for whose talents and business I have long had great admiration. With the larger facilities which the company now has, I believe we can offer advertisers an art service unexcelled in the city.

If you have no immediate use for such a service yourself, may I ask as an "Alpha Delt in advertising" that you remember where I am located and let it be known among your acquaintances who can use and do appreciate high-class, commercial art work, honestly priced?

If you do have work of this sort, I shall consider it a great favor if you will remember that my time and facilities are at your disposal.

And I shall be glad to call upon you at any time that is most convenient.

Fraternally yours,

The writer of this letter was surprised by the poor returns from it. Possibly he lost his faith in human

friendship. We have only to examine the letter, however, to understand why it failed. What is the proposition? "*If* you have work, *I* shall consider it a *favor if* you will remember that *I* am with a company which *I believe* can give such and such service." What is there in that to make a man reach out and tinkle the telephone bell? The proposition could not well have been feebler without fairly fading away.

There are other obvious weaknesses. The first paragraph is unnecessary. The second is excessively formal and, as a business-getting statement, meaningless. The third is inexcusable in its negative coloring, flattery and presumption. A more impotent conclusion to a letter that starts out so bravely with "Dear Brother" it would be hard to find.

5. *How to strengthen a proposition.*—But the chief and sufficient offense of the letter is the fatuousness of the proposition. Was it not possible for the writer to have submitted some ideas? Could he not have written: "Smith, Jones & Robinson, the big hardware house, is using this type of form letter and booklet with great success. Isn't this one of the new ideas you're looking for?" Or: "Did you notice the embossing on the cover of the enclosed booklet? You know what embossing *costs.* Do you know what it *adds in value* to the booklet? I didn't, before Brown & Black, the people we did the job for, told me. It's a 'find' and I want to pass it along to you." Anything to show he was looking after the other man's interests!

The proposition would then be essentially this: "Here's an idea you may be able to use. I'm passing it along to you to show you the kind of a house we are and the kind of work we do."

At the very worst, if the writer had no ideas at all, he could at least *ask for business* and not advance the proposition that perhaps there wasn't any.

6. *Changing from negative to positive.*—If the writer of the following letter, president of one of the largest storage warehouse properties in the world, had considered what kind of a proposition he was submitting to his customers, would he have written it in the following way?

It is always unpleasant when it becomes necessary to advance storage rates, but it seems impossible to avoid doing so at the present time.

You are undoubtedly familiar with the great increase in taxes and labor costs which are taking place. The increase in taxes alone for next year, will make an additional expenditure of more than $60,000.00 a year to this company, and the labor problem will mean even more than this.

You are, I am sure, willing to admit that a good service cannot be maintained by any organization, unless it be upon a basis allowing reasonable profit. We are, as of January first, revising our storage rates upon nearly all commodities to a moderate extent, and the object of this letter is to acquaint you with that fact.

When you have merchandise for storage, we will be very glad to take up each individual case with you, and agree, I am sure, upon a rate which will be satisfactory to you, and admit of our meeting these increased operating burdens.

With appreciation of the business which you have given us in the past, I am, etc., etc.

The tone of the letter is bad; but the most serious fault is with the proposition: "We're going to jump the rent on you. We know you won't like it, but we can't help it." Why raise the question of an increase at all? Why not draw attention to a fact of much greater importance?

Our new prices are so and so. How much space will you probably need for 1920? *On account of the general business expansion,* demands on us are heavy, but we want to take care of our old customers first. So won't you kindly let us know?

As compared with shrinking storage space, the matter of price dwindles into insignificance.

7. *How good-will propositions grow in importance.*—There is a phase of advertising that parallels one of sales correspondence and to a certain extent of all types of correspondence. When a man begins to advertise he generally seeks immediate sales. The tone of his advertising and the character of his proposition are urgent; he may not shriek, but there is a certain aggressiveness and lack of dignity, both in the advertising and the sales work, accompanied by a considerable degree of friction, and the results are disproportionately small.

By and by, however, the advertiser reaches the stage where he does not have to explain and urge anything, or urge it over-strongly. This is the stage of general publicity, of repetition, pictures, reminders, interest, good nature, humor. People, being amused or interested, take to it kindly, remember it

better and are more easily influenced by it. Good-will rolls up and results are more easily obtained.

It is a good deal the same with correspondence. At first, without a regular clientele of dealers, agents, salesmen, it is thought necessary to beg, wheedle, push, pull and command, in order to get business. Perhaps it really is necessary. But after a while, the house reaches the stage of calm friendliness; it informs, suggests, helps. And the results are greater.

8. *Good-will idea wins over selling effort.*—A well-known wholesale dry goods house had for years besieged a certain important department store for business, but to no avail; it had never succeeded in selling it the smallest bill of goods. No other reason was given by the store for its attitude than that it was satisfied with its old connections. At length the jobbers changed their tactics. They called off their salesman and ceased to press for business. They instead contented themselves with sending the store from time to time a brief letter saying, for example, that they had bought a job lot of this or that kind of goods and could offer it at a very low inside price while it lasted. Samples were inclosed. There was never a request to buy.

After five or six of these letters had been sent, the jobbers, who had anticipated a long campaign, were agreeably surprised to receive an order in return. Others followed in response to other letters and in the course of time the business was placed regularly thru the jobbers' district salesman.

These letters typify the third class of sales letters. Their object was not immediate sales, but the promotion of good-will. The jobbers expected that the department store would ignore them at first, but felt that it would become more and more interested as each successive bargain was offered in a friendly way and at length yield its prejudice or obstinacy to business judgment.

9. *Promotional propositions sell by indirection.*— The same promotional quality is in letters that pass along trade news and gossip, that keep customers informed by transmitting helpful information. In technical and engineering lines there is often no formal selling at all, the whole effort of house representatives and correspondents being devoted to cooperating with customers for the purpose of helping them solve their problems. "If a salesman should bring in an order, I would know there was something wrong," says the executive of a large steel company. "If our educational work is rightly done, the customers will inevitably come to us for that which we can do best."

In such a letter as this concern would write—the third class of letter—the proposition would really be something like this: "We're giving you these data because we think you can use them. We are asking nothing in return. We know you will give us any business you think we ought to have. We don't expect you to give us any other kind, and we don't want it." Such an attitude, placing the customer

under obligation, leaves the writer in a very strong position. Service that seems disinterested, that comes as near as possible to being disinterested, invites reciprocity and gets it.

10. *Greater the resistance, more the power needed.* The three kinds of letters differ not only in object and character, but also in the amount of power necessary to achieve the object.

Necessarily, the letter aiming at immediate sales has the hardest task to perform and must be highest-powered to overcome that resistance. It is much easier to "pull" inquiries which do not commit the inquirer to buy, and less power is needed for the purpose. When all that is asked of a reader is attention or interest, as in the case of a "good-will" letter, then the power required to secure that is the slightest. Inasmuch, however, as attention and interest are themselves sources of power, there is no telling what further reaches may result from a very small initial impulse, as is suggested by the case just cited of the jobbers and the department store. Low-powered good-will propositions may very easily win thru by repetition when the higher-powered sales and inquiry-seeking types fail to impress.

11. *Difference in sales and service powers.*—It is apparent that the two kinds of power are different. The power of the sales and inquiry proposition is what might be called a sales power; it is exerted by means of talking points, which aim to adapt the proposition to the reader. The good-will proposition's power we

might call a service power; it comes from pleasing and obliging him.

Both kinds of power are entirely distinct from the power developed in the presentation of a proposition, that, namely, which is derived from clear, forceful, pleasing or moving statement. We shall come to that in the next chapter. That, too, is a part of the sales power, but it is not the part we are now considering.

However important service may be, it can never be more important than quality, quantity and price. Service is something that counts after all the other elements are right. The house correspondents might furnish information and trade news in great quantity and in the right tone, but if the goods were poor in quality or high in price, or the house bore a poor reputation, then the good-will generated by the letter would be negligible. It is when the house, the goods and the sale propositions are beyond criticism that the good-will proposition produces power. This is so because satisfaction with goods bought is the best good-will of all.

12. *Selling points for action.*—Consequently, in writing letters for immediate results, whether orders, inquiries or good-will, we must look to the sales proposition as the first and foremost generator of power. The generation, as we know, is thru selling points. No amount of fine talk can make up for the absence of supporting facts. It is not the bogus mining stock promoter's fine talk, but his *"tall"* talk that makes

him dangerous; his proposition is built to order; if there are no facts, he invents them.

13. *Dressing up the proposition.*—The problem of the writer of legitimate sales letters likewise is to generate sufficient power to overcome the natural resistance of the reader, which includes with itself the resistance provided by competition. He must frame his proposition so that it will stand out from the ruck of propositions.

Suppose, for example, that he is going after an immediate order and the proposition as originally conceived was to sell a suit of clothes of certain quality, cut and finish at $20. If everybody else were making about that same appeal, he would have no advantage to advertise. His proposition, it is apparent, would be helped by the inclusion of certain desirable features, say, rainproofed fabric, extra trousers, or lounge cap of the same fabric, even at a slight advance in price, because these things would make the proposition stand out.

The privilege of returning goods adds to the power of most propositions, tho it may weaken others. In the case of a new machine, or an ore discovery, offers to demonstrate the utility are an advantage. The connection of men of known ability and character always increases the attractiveness of a proposition.

14. *Fitting articles to needs of proposition.*—The cardinal importance of the proposition is still further proved by the fact that when there are several articles to exploit and a choice of one is to be made, it is the

demand for a proposition and not the nature of the article which is the determining factor. "What have we that can be played up to head the line?" is the way business men often put it. And often something has to be added to a line for the sole purpose of providing the basis for a strong proposition.

15. *Bringing the proposition up to date.*—Perhaps quite as frequently, or even more frequently, the reverse takes place. Propositions go stale or times change and a new proposition is needed. "You should buy because of the quality," must be changed to "You should buy because everybody is buying it," or "because of new styles," or "because of sanitary factories," or "because of the way we treat our employes." New talking points, angles, or uses are needed from time to time to appeal to people whose interest may be losing the first fine edge. These are all propositions.

16. *Classifications apply to all letters.*—We have discussed the three classes of propositions from the point of view of sales letters, but any other kind of letter might have been similarly analyzed, as for example, a collection letter: it may try for immediate settlement, or for an explanation, or may take the form of a statement, with "good-will" inclosures. The same principles apply in this case as in the case of the sales letter, and they apply to all letters. If we want quick business action, we must make the proposition clear and attractive. If we want to stir curiosity and get a request for information, we hit a

few high spots to stimulate curiosity and hold back the rest of the facts. Lastly, if we wish to impress for the sake of future relations, we speak, or better still, act, in a friendly way. Simple enough, but too often neglected. Yet all important.

### REVIEW

Classify a few of the letters you write or receive according to the type of proposition, and in each case summarize the proposition.

Which class of propositions needs the greatest power to urge them? Which the least?

What in each case is the nature of the resistance to be overcome?

What is the nature of the power required?

How would you strengthen a proposition?

Test your theory on the proposition in letters you have recently written or received.

# CHAPTER VII

## FUNDAMENTALS OF THE PRESENTATION

1. *Good presentation effaces itself.*—The only purpose of the presentation being to explain the proposition, it is plain that it should confine itself to that and not indulge in aimless rambles in other directions. When a presentation is well made, the reader is hardly conscious of the words. The proposition stands out so clearly and attractively that he sees nothing else. He is absorbed in the contemplation of the *facts.*

2. *Presentation fits proposition to reader.*—Note how the presentation is handled in the following opening paragraphs of a long form letter sent to a selected list of women by a well-known publishing house:

> Are you the most envied person in the community?
>
> You would like to be, wouldn't you?
>
> You'd enjoy having your children grow up in an atmosphere of beautiful pictures and good books—giving them the advantage of a liberal education?
>
> You'd like to have your friends say, "I wish I had your knowledge of art, literature, travel, etc.?"
>
> You'd like to be considered "the clever hostess," thru your ability to converse well on almost any subject?
>
> These accomplishments are promised to you by the Mentor Association.

Would the woman who reads these lines think of the words—or of the idea and picture? The questions asked are the very ones thousands of women put to themselves. It is only by a deliberate effort that we discover the art beneath them and realize how much thought went into their framing.

3. *Room for imagination and personality.*—If the presentation is a mere accommodation of the proposition to the reader, it might seem that a correspondent is more or less restricted to matter-of-fact statement and is left little opportunity for the display of wit, imagination and personality. This is very far from being true, as the preceding letter and the one following should show. The second letter is printed on a letterhead that has brilliantly colored pictures of birds and a butterfly, and is dated "The First Day of Spring."

Suppose you went down the street today and could not read the signs. How many interesting things would slip out of your life.

Nature is putting out her signs—the gorgeous ones she shows us every year. The crocuses are up. Already the sap has begun to rise and the birds are coming back. Already comes stealing over us the desire to chuck it all and get into the woods where live things are.

On every side nature is calling you to look at her signs—how many of them can you read? Somehow, it is hard to find books that tell you about them as they should. I know, for I have been working with nature books a long time.

At last I have found what I have been looking for so long—a set of books which tells you about nature with all the charm of nature herself. They are simply called by the

names of the things they tell about, "Birds," "Trees," "Butterflies," and "Flowers;" and they are as beautifully gotten up as they are brilliantly written. There are hundreds of specimens illustrated in black and white.

Neltje Blanchan wrote two of them—no name stands higher than hers. Julia Ellen Rogers, already famous for her nature work, tells you about trees, and Clarence Weed has written about butterflies.

I thought of getting up a circular to tell you about them, but they are so extraordinary that no circular could do them justice. I want you to see the books themselves, and so I have made arrangements to send the complete set, all charges prepaid, on approval.

Send the inclosed card and all four of the books will go to you at once. But send now; I need hardly say that any supply of books like these, at this time of year, will not last long. I cannot promise to send you a set unless you mail the card today.

Very truly yours,
NELSON DOUBLEDAY.

HOW MANY OF THESE DO YOU KNOW.

*Birds*—Cardinal, Meadow Lark, King Bird, Phoebe.
*Butterflies*—Angel Wings, Crescent Spots, Peacock.
*Flowers*—Heart-of-Earth, Wild Thyme, Monkey Flower.
*Trees*—White Ash, Dogwood, Chestnut, Poplar.

No lack of imagination or personality there. It will be said that the subject encourages it, but we know how a very little thought or feeling will bring out the poetry of almost any topic. Imagination can be used to make the customer see, understand and in the end be satisfied with his purchase. The definition allows all the latitude in the world.

4. *Word juggling discouraged.*—As a matter of

fact, the big houses do not encourage literary fireworks. One reason is that there is danger of being misunderstood and giving offense. An even more serious criticism is that they center attention on the performer or the performance and distract attention from the proposition.

5. *When presentation is good and when poor.*—The presentation is good when it plays up the proposition. It is poor when either by rambling or by smartness it gets in the proposition's way. There is a seeming exception in the successful "personality" letters of some experts—Elbert Hubbard, for example—but it will almost always be found that these men are exploiting their personality; it is a part of their proposition.

With the only apparent exceptions to the rule disposed of, we are ready for the question: how can we handle the presentation so as to keep the proposition in the spotlight, all the time? How can we manipulate words, facts, ideas, arguments, so that they will all cooperate to a common end?

6. *What letters inherit from literature.*—It so happens that this very subject of presentation has been treated in connection with an older and greater art than letter writing, an art of which letter writing is really only an offshoot—the art of literature. For hundreds and even thousands of years, the appeal of mind to mind thru the spoken, written and printed word has had its accepted principles. They are the same in an oration, a newspaper editorial, a brief for

the Supreme Court, in Homer and Shakespeare, as they are in a letter or an advertisement. The principles are the rules of logic, rhetoric and grammar. We cannot get away from them and secure favorable results in our correspondence any more than we can get away from the underlying principles of common sense and judgment, and succeed in business. We need all the fundamentals.

Here, for the moment, we may pass over logic and grammar, and come directly to rhetoric, which is essentially the art of presentation, of expressing thought in language so as, in the dictionary definition, "to influence others." And Genung gives a famous definition that is even more significant regarding the "other man." Rhetoric, he says, is "the art of *adapting discourse,* in harmony with the subject and occasion, to the requirements *of a reader or hearer.*"

The definition says nothing about the important matter of influencing the reader, or "getting results." But it assumes it; understanding and feeling, we are told by the psychologists, inevitably lead to some sort of action.

7. *Business devises its own instruction.*—The writers on rhetoric generally group the aims of presentation under the heads of clearness, force and ease or elegance, or else of clearness and interest, and show how each of the qualities is obtained. Most business men, finding the treatment too technical, have preferred to use shortcuts of their own devising. They like to list for guidance the simple requirements of a

letter, as clearness, terseness, coherency. Or the broader aims, such as confidence, credibility, "human interest" and "punch." Or the mental qualities which should be reflected, as sincerity, enthusiasm and imagination.

8. *Qualities a letter should have.*—One list is about as good as another, since no one that is short enough to be convenient can at the same time be very comprehensive; we shall be obliged to read into any of them a good deal that is not there.

According to one list, that of the "Seven C's," the presentation of a proposition should be

Concrete
Candid
Courteous
Clear
Complete
Concise
Correct

Without these qualities, no letter can be credible, create confidence, inspire interest or "carry the punch." To the extent that it has these qualities, it will also have those effects.

9. *First, a letter should be Concrete.*—The first requirement of any reader is that the subject or proposition shall have something to do with him. The city man is not interested in farming machinery. The $10,000 man doesn't want to read about cheap instalment propositions. To get the reader's attention, the

proposition must be "tied up" to him. The same is equally, perhaps even more, true of the presentation, which deals with facts, evidence and arguments. Thoughts, facts, language, all must be such as he understands and appreciates, they must be material and pertinent, that is, *concrete*. This is the true source of "human interest" and "punch." If we make the proposition fit, the reader needs little urging to take the steps we wish him to take.

10. *Fixing it up for the logical prospect.*—A man wishing to sell some rural property in Vermont drafted a long letter to be sent to a list of 2500 wealthy people. Before he had sent it he was persuaded to change the plan and use the following letter, which with an enclosed sheet of particulars was sent to 500 names taken from the New York Stock Exchange directory.

> Would you be interested in an easily reached farm of several hundred acres, located in the highlands of Vermont, with a sixty-acre private lake, the best hunting and fishing, all at a very reasonable price?
>
> The inclosure will give you some particulars, but, if you are interested to any extent, you will find it worth while to address the owner thru my office.

Five hundred letters were sent out, one answer was received, and this one answer sold the property at the owner's figure. The specialist who wrote the letter for the owner analyzed the case to him, as follows:

"Only a few persons will be in the market for such a property as this, or could be persuaded to buy it.

The chief problem is to find those people, or one of them. You are probably more likely to find them among the wealthy members of the New York Stock Exchange than elsewhere. In writing them it is useless to try to sell thru persuasion. They know what they want. Just give them the facts. If they are interested, they'll say so. Make the barest statement in the letter itself—nobody below 14th Street reads a letter of more than a dozen lines. Put your other facts on a separate sheet, and make them brief."

Accepting the expert's analysis as sound, it is evident that the property owner would have made a serious mistake if he had sent a long letter to an omnibus list. All wealthy people, whether New Yorkers or not, read few of the many letters they receive and a long letter would stand little chance of getting attention. Since the proposition demanded a wealthy man's interest, it was necessary to humor his desire for brevity. Analyze the letter—"easily reached farm," "several hundred acres," "highlands," "large private lake," "best of hunting and fishing," "reasonable price"—and you will see the tremendous appeal to a man who wants that sort of thing and can afford to pay for it. The letter is all facts, and the facts for such a man are *concrete.*

11. *Noting the difference in readers.*—We found in an earlier chapter that the viewpoints of men, women and children, while they may be similar in many respects, differ in others, and that the same

thing is true of business men, farmers, mechanics, professional men, the dwellers of the city, town and village; citizens of the North, South, South America, Europe and the Far East. These differences in viewpoint arise out of differences of heredity, social condition and education. Business men owning adjoining stores, operators working side by side in the factory, look out upon the world thru different eyes.

Big business men, successful letter writers, acute salesmen, are very keen in realizing these differences in their customers and making allowances for them, but less able business men, seeing the differences, perhaps, but not taking in their significance, often fall into blunders and sustain losses. To escape these it is necessary to do what the experienced executive does, "study the market."

From the sales correspondent's point of view, the reader is either a buyer for his house, or a private purchaser. In the case of the former, while the problem is to satisfy him with the proposition as a professional buyer, it is perhaps necessary in addition to please him as an individual. We may consider the presentation then under the following heads.

12. *Questions that must be answered.*—First: does the presentation fit the house's needs? This depends largely upon the proposition. It is a great failing of commercial houses to take it for granted that the customer understands the proposition just as the writer understands it. The retailer may not

grasp the wholesaler's point of view, and the manufacturer's shop talk or technical jargon may be all Greek to the outsider.

These mistakes will be avoided if the writer learns how to put himself in the place of the buyer, understanding what he wants or might want, and then show him how the article in question gives him just that.

There is another thing to be considered: does the presentation fit the buyer's position and business dignity? It may be truthful and yet rub him the wrong way. In many concerns the president or general manager is buyer and is even less impressed by flippant or narrow-gauge arguments than the ordinary buyer would be.

Does the presentation fit the reader's earning power and economic status? If it does not, the whole proposition falls flat.

Does it fit his social and intellectual status; his tastes, interests? Education and experience work great changes in men. Generally speaking, the higher up the social scale, the more critical and discriminating the taste, the wider the interests, the more elevated the sentiments. Good correspondents take this fact into consideration.

Does the presentation fit the reader's town, section, state, country? Does it fit his race or religion? It will not do to let an expression or argument slip in that may be construed as a reflection on locality, race or faith.

13. *Letter writers must know human nature.*—

No less vital than the differences are the traits that men have in common. Does the proposition fit the reader as a human being? The question would be amusing if for many letter writers it were not next door to tragical. Millions of letters are written every year that fail and are foredoomed to failure because the writers do not know the common motives, instincts, habits of people; those which make them buy or refuse to buy, pay or refuse to pay, answer or decline to answer.

14. *Summary of the human motives.*—Boiled down, the reasons why men buy have been stated as the advantage to be gained in time, labor, or money; the satisfaction of pride; and yielding to weakness.

The list, however, is too narrow for all purposes. It leaves out some of the strongest motives, or else includes them under weakness. The predominant motives in buying change with the market. Those of buyers for business houses are of course, on the surface, altogether materialistic. Those of individual buyers are only partly so.

We may say, for example, that a man outfitting for a mountain-climbing trip buys the best he can for his money, but such an explanation overlooks his ultimate, fundamental motive in buying, which is a means to the thrill that comes from flirting with danger. If there are a number of stores where he can buy his outfit at about the same quality and price, and one of these writes him a letter expatiating sympathetically upon the delights of mountain-climbing and the

other stores merely describe the quality of the goods or quote prices, will he not naturally favor the sympathetic store, perhaps even against a friend's recommendation of some other?

The sentimental appeal is always strong when it is appropriate, and when, as is so often the case, there is a latitude of choice, so that the buyer feels safe wherever he buys, it is virtually a principle that he will patronize the house that treats him with friendly insight, as in the case just mentioned.

Therefore, as letter writers, we need a list that takes in more than the immediate buying motives. We need to be aware of the instincts of self-preservation, love, gain, pride, comfort, danger, goodness and justice as things to which men respond.

A very comprehensive and suggestive list of the economic motives was given by the late Carleton H. Parker, economist and psychologist:

Gregariousness, love of kind, social instinct
Parental bent, motherliness, kindliness
Curiosity, manipulation, workmanship
Acquisitiveness, collecting, ownership
Fear and flight
Mental activity, invention
Housing or settling
Migration
Hunting
Anger, pugnacity
Revolt at confinement, at being limited in liberty of action and choice
Revulsion
Leadership and mastery

Subordination
Display, vanity, ostentation
Sex

At first thought, it would appear that none of us would ever need to think of more than a few of these instincts. But reflection will open our eyes. "Parental bent"—advertisers are more and more appealing with, thru and to children; to mothers, the buyers of most things in the home and an influence in the purchase of nearly everything else, the child appeal is the strongest of all. "Fear" is at the basis of many business appeals, as of insurance, medical, sanitary and hygienic advertising, fire extinguishers, door and window guards, etc. "Mental activity"—all amusements including books, plays. "Housing"—everything about the home, its furnishings. "Migration"—travel. "Revulsion"—against dirt, noise, unpleasantness of every sort. "Leadership and mastery"—the spring of ambition. "Subordination"—the desire to learn from and to follow a leader, an authority, such as any business man seeks to be in his own line. "Display"—no need to dwell on the importance of this as a motive, or of "sex" which covers every attraction that man finds in woman, and woman in man.

These are the fundamental instincts and wants of life. Life is built up out of their satisfaction and the writer whose hope it is to influence men and women must necessarily acquire some knowledge of them.

15. *Fundamental appeals to interests.*—An interesting kind of list, not of instincts, but of the appeals

to the instinctive in man, as factors of entertainment, is given by A. E. Phillips, in his book on "Effective Speaking":

Vital—life, family, business
Unusual—new and strange
Uncertain—suspense
Similar—to our own life and opinions
Antagonistic—clash, conflict, drama
Animate—action, movement, color
Concrete—tangible, specific, personal.

All the things that interest men, that they are fond of hearing, seeing, and thinking about, fall under one or another or all of these classes. They have the most direct application to the art of business correspondence. Fill your letter to the office man with talk about his business and he will read. Tell him what is new and strange—not too strange—and he listens. Upset his preconceived notions, make him uncertain, and he reads on to settle his mind. If you can get action, color and movement into the correspondence, so much the better. Antagonism between the writer and reader has no place in a letter, but that is not the meaning. If we write, "Your problem, Mr. Dealer, is to move the goods off your shelves, and you've struggled with it more or less successfully," we bring in the idea of antagonism; the word "problem" itself suggests struggle. To set up a difficulty and then show the way to demolish or eliminate it is an appeal to the principle of the antagonistic. Lastly, we must have facts, ideas, mental pictures of *concrete* things

known to the reader. We may use any or all of these factors in one letter, as we please.

16. *Every reader interested in himself.*—If the foregoing several lists mean anything at all, they mean that every normal, intelligent man is hungry for more facts that affect or may affect him, his life, future, business. If we handle our proposition from his point of view and show him how it will benefit him to accept it, if we make it fit him individually, and do so in language that touches on some of the motives and appeals we have gone over, it will be next to impossible for him not to find it deeply interesting. Dulness comes from the absence of specific facts and ideas concerning the reader. It is facts, new, concrete, specific facts, that give a letter gripping human appeal.

When the house correspondent has these specific facts about a buyer's work, his town, its size, character, rate of growth, chief industries, bank clearings, he can put into his letter what fiction writers call "local color," the thing which helps to give reality and vividness to their stories. In this way he is able to avoid abstractions and generalizations that weaken. He gets close to the daily life of the man and talks to him in the language he understands.

17. *How to freshen a stale style.*—It often happens that poor correspondents, after they go out into the field and talk with customers, or get out among the salesmen, or go digging thru the files for data, write good letters.

As long as a correspondent has a mental picture of his readers and knows how they live, think and feel, he knows the kind of information to give them; he gets it; and his letters are good. When his letters begin to lose "punch," it is a sign that he is forgetting to be interested in the readers.

The only way to recover his freshness is to reverse the process that has betrayed him, to put himself in the other man's place, see things thru his eyes, and realize what he wants. Doing this will often clear up all the difficulties. If it does not, the prescription must be stronger: the correspondent must get a first hand contact with his people and find out what he has been overlooking.

### REVIEW

How would you distinguish between the proposition and presentation of it in a letter?

Why should such a distinction be made?

Which is the more fundamental and important, and why?

Do the lists of qualities a letter should have apply to the proposition or to the presentation?

Apply the list of "Seven C's" to the letters you receive with a view to ascertaining whether the writer has done his best in each case.

Apply it to some of your own recent letters.

Disregard the list of qualities given and make up a list of your own that will cover all essential points.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FUNDAMENTALS OF THE PRESENTATION APPLIED

1. *Using the imagination.*—Getting out into the field and gathering specific facts about people, as counselled in the preceding chapter, is always desirable, but not always practicable; there are times when we have to fall back on our imagination.

It was impossible for the writer of the following form letter to have known precisely how all of the matrons, young and old, to whom it was sent, would feel about having a Detroit Electric car for a Christmas present. He had, however, a general knowledge of human nature and the field, and a lively imagination. The letter follows:

December 21, 1887.

*Dear Sandy Claus*

I want for Crismus most of all a *sled* for koastin down hill a red one I like the best

And a pare of legins and mittens two *please* bring me a sled long enuf for two me and Bob we is going to be marreed when we gro up.

Yours respekfully

Jeannette.

THE GABLES

December 8, 1917.

*Dear Santa Claus—*

It has been thirty years since I wrote you a letter. Now

I am wondering if you would be as good to me again as you were when I asked you for that wonderful sled thirty years ago.

I would be the happiest woman in the world if I could see, standing at the door on Christmas morning, one of those beautiful, inclosed electric cars that I can drive all by myself.

I don't want it just for myself, tho. It's for Bob, my husband, and for Lucy and Dick, our children. Bob says he wants a gasoline car. But I want one I can drive myself without getting nervous; an inclosed car so I can take the children to school when the weather is bad.

Bob doesn't mean to be selfish, tho. He has an idea that an electric car won't go as fast or as far as we want to ride. That's because he doesn't know about the modern Detroit Electric.

But I know about it. The Russells next door have a new one and I've been out with them a lot of times. Why, once we went a hundred miles and didn't have to recharge the battery. And I think that's as far as anybody wants to ride on one run, don't you?

The Russells bought a gas car first because they thought they wanted to do a lot of touring and they never went as much as 100 miles on one run. After gasoline and tires got so high they didn't use their car nearly as much as they wanted to, so finally they sold it and bought the Detroit Electric.

Now they motor all they want to and Mr. Russell says that it costs less than half as much to run and keep up the Detroit as it did the gas car, and of course they get a lot more use out of it, too, because anyone in the family can drive it.

I didn't mean to write such a long letter, Santa Claus, but I am so excited about the Detroit Electric that I couldn't stop talking about it. Don't bring any kind of car but the Detroit for all of my friends have that kind so it must be the best.

I know Bob will be pleased with it too when he sees it and

especially when he finds out how economical it is. I think we all ought to economize these days, don't you?

Well! A Merry Christmas, Santa Claus.

Affectionately yours,

Jeannette.

P. S.—Please excuse the typewriter.

2. *Facts more effective than fine writing.*—This method of letting the reader convince himself by homely facts, by things that belong in his life, is almost always so infinitely more effective than what is called fine writing that there is hardly any comparison between the two. The average man cannot enjoy Shakespeare or Browning. Show him, however, a way to make fifty dollars, and he's your friend. Really fine writing, to be effective, requires talent and, broadly speaking, it is not worth while cultivating when there is available a simpler, more direct and more resultful way to the customer's heart.

This does not mean that Browning, Shakespeare, or the Bible itself cannot be studied to advantage by the letter writer, or that the best in Dickens, Thackeray and Irving may not serve as models. Their knowledge of human nature, of methods of appeal and word values, should be of great help. At the same time, the letter writer cannot copy their leisurely, comprehensive style. He has no volume of five hundred thousand words in which to make his point, but must do so, generally, in two or three hundred.

It cannot be denied that "tall" writing is sometimes effective in letters just as it sometimes is in advertise-

ments. The truth generally is, in such cases, that the house's previous letters were even less interesting. It is the change of style and not the style's value that is responsible for the result.

3. *Letters should be Candid.*—Second only to being concrete is the requirement that the presentation be *candid.* This means first of all truthful. There ought never to be any question about that. Too often, however, the rule rather is, *appear* to tell the truth. A business man may think nothing of putting into a form letter going broadcast such a statement as: "I have decided to write you personally." The expression is palpably insincere and undermines confidence in the proposition. Worst of all, it leaves the writer blind to all the better ways of getting attention.

The power of truthfulness is being more and more recognized. It grows with demonstration.

Candid means also sincere, frank, artless, aboveboard, straightforward. These are attractive qualities and compel liking. For example, consider the effect of the following letter:

I've just been looking over the letters in Eytinge's files. Of course you know who Louis Victor Eytinge is—for you are interested in him. So am I, for I'm one of his fellow inmates and do some little work with and for him, right here behind the walls.

But I'm interested in still another thing. You may have heard that Eytinge has a book out. He doesn't own the rights to it and it is not offered to the general public, for the bully good reason that the magazine in which the fine

articles on letter writing were run, is reserving the book for its own regular subscribers.

However, they've allowed Eytinge and me to have a very limited supply of this little book, "Writing Business Letters Which Get The Business," and I'm going to market the couple of hundred allotted us. It is just a little cloth-bound, gold-stamped book—not so very thick, but mighty valuable, as it has been pronounced the best and most modern thing of its kind. There's a little editorial sketch of Eytinge, with his portrait, and every one that goes out from here will have the author-convict's autograph. All it costs is just one dollar.

But—I'll moneyback guarantee that you are more than merely satisfied and if you'll order right away while the thing is in your mind, I'll add an illustrated copy of his famous Toronto paper, "Giving Letters Life and Decent Dress." Do you want one?

What is the power in the letter, for undeniably it is there? Isn't it, first of all, the *candor* of the writer? He's a convict, and tells it. That isn't what sells the book he offers, but it is what starts our interest and makes us read and weigh the proposition. We see that the letter samples the book and we agree that since the letter is so good, the book must be good also. The prison setting is a considerable part of the capital of this interesting enterprise, but the candid, straightforward, independent way in which the partners go about it, without pulling long faces or inviting sympathy, counts for even more.

Candor may be shown in more than one way. It is candid, for example, not to use too much strategy and finesse with the reader, if they suggest insincerity. How refreshing to get a letter that apparently

has nothing to do except tell the facts! It comes straight to the point, states the proposition, gives reasons for buying and adds any information that seems to have a bearing. It is impressive if for no other reason than that it is not too common.

4. *Letter should be Courteous.*—After candor, we may put *courtesy* as an important quality in the presentation and we may stretch it a bit in order to include such close cousins as tactfulness, consideration, sympathy, cordiality and even helpfulness. Under the head of courtesy comes service, and all that it stands for.

Probably few executives realize how many offensive, good-will depreciating letters go out from their offices in the course of a year. One important house seeks to curb the habit thru its correspondence manual and bulletins, as the following extract from one of the bulletins shows:

BETTER LETTERS—COURTESY

"There, I guess that'll hold that boy for a while!" The speaker signed his name with a flourish, blotted the ink with a bang, and tossed the letter into the mail basket with a "well done" finality.

Everyone around, except the writer himself, knew that a mistake was being made. No one had the courage to say: "Old man, you'd better tear that letter up and try it again tomorrow. It won't 'hold' your reader, but it probably will retard your progress and damage the reputation of your house."

The letter went out—to a responsible person in an organization whose business had been studiously cultivated. A few days later a reply was received. The reply was not

addressed to the writer of the original letter, but to his President. It read as follows:

> Yesterday I received a letter from Mr. ——, in your —— Department, that violated every principle of courtesy and even of common business decency. In the first burst of impatience I destroyed it, which probably is just as well, and mentally eliminated your institution from my list.
>
> As I thought it over, tho, I realized that the writer of the letter was probably young and inexperienced, and knowing as I do your ideas in respect to the manner of treating customers, I determined to call your attention to the incident, and then forget it.
>
> You will understand, of course, that this is written with no desire to do Mr. —— any harm, but rather in a spirit of helpfulness to him, that the same mistake may not be repeated where it might have disastrous results.

We do not know any better illustration than the above of the danger that lurks in a hot temper, or in an attempt at sarcasm or cleverness; nor do we, on the other hand, know of a better illustration of true courtesy than is demonstrated in the reply quoted.

*Don't* write a letter when angry, or when the least resentment toward the addressee lingers in your mind. Cool off. Let your letter rest a day; two days, if necessary.

*Do* place yourself in the shoes of your reader, and write such a letter to him as—under similar circumstances—you would like him to write to you.

An interest in the welfare of your house; an interest in the welfare of your reader; honesty, truthfulness, earnestness—these are the things of which courtesy is made.

5. *Making courtesy mean a lot.*—The presentation is courteous when it considers the other man first, talks of his interests and tries to promote them. It is

courteous when its manner is human and natural. It is courteous when it does not use crowding, "do-it-now" arguments and exhortations without reason—once in a while there may be a real reason. Courtesy stands for giving the reader everything he needs to enable him to make up his mind in his own way. There is real opportunity for the writer in knowing what the reader wants, in anticipating all he can ask or rightly require, and then providing it; doing it, moreover, in a wholly considerate, natural and unstrained way. Business houses that habitually furnish helpful information do not lose by it.

Naturally, it is always better to suggest rather than direct or command. Readers are quick to detect the tone of assumed authority and resent it. In the case of persons of exaggerated sensitiveness, it is often necessary to write with extreme tactfulness. Usually it is true courtesy to assume that the other man means to be courteous himself, fair, honorable and desirous of knowing the facts and making good his mistakes if shown.

Courtesy can extend to things that are little in themselves but make a great impression on the reader. When a house correspondent, in answering an inquiry from another business house, gives the date or number of the inquiry, or restates the subject with dates and all information required to understand it, it is a seemingly small matter, but it makes the reader, who may often have been annoyed by replies that are not so considerate, very grateful indeed and might-

ily appreciative of the house. Time and effort can seldom be spent to better advantage than in doing things of this sort.

6. *Letter should be Clear.*—Next in importance to being concrete, candid and courteous, it is the presentation's duty to be *clear*. It must be clear, first, in meaning. Many letter writers do not realize that a letter can be clear in the meaning of separate words and phrases and yet obscure as a whole. To be clear, the presentation must have unity. Since most people cannot or will not think about more than one thing at a time, the writer should put only one big or fundamental thought in his letter. He may lead up to it, or analyze it, but he should not confuse it by introducing other ideas that do not belong in the communication.

Again, the presentation must have coherence. One idea must lead into the next. The facts must have some relation to each other as well as to the proposition, and if necessary they must be explained. If we can do this with word-pictures and movement, instead of dull "wherebys" and "becauses," the gain will be great. Few people like to reason, or can follow close argument. Everybody can understand pictures, even in suggestion. In fact, most people cannot think without making mental pictures of things. Thus, if we wish to make a thing clear to them, either for the purpose of facilitating a sale or a collection, or else getting something done, we must describe the matter in such a way that they can see a

whole story unroll before them. "Paint the picture and put the prospect in it," is the salesman's formula, and it is psychologically sound.

Consider, for example, the following paragraphs from the viewpoint solely of clearness and visualization; the letter is a follow-up written by a company teaching collection methods:

If you had a chance to inspect the work and profits of every paying business in your community, you would *not* —a hundred to one—choose to stay in your present position.

Most men start in business without an opportunity to select the work that suits them. They get into the harness tighter and tighter until they are dispossessed of the "nerve" to break away. That is the reason 95 per cent are failures. They haven't had the chance at the start. They are tied down. They waver and fail to come to a decision when an opportunity is presented.

Have you the "nerve"—have you the *grit*—to get out of your rut? Will you square your shoulders and say to yourself definitely and with determination—"This won't do. I'm going to have another iron in the fire. I'm going to have my chance."

Just think and figure a little. Tens on tens of thousands of dollars—a vast capital—is put up by business men of your community—*every community*—in the shape of uncollected bills. Thousands of people who owe money are having the use of it without interest—and they are not entitled to it. This money should be collected and can be collected by experts. Collection agencies already established make as high as 50 per cent on all they collect, and there are very few of these agencies contrasted with the vast amount of outstanding bills. *Many of them* do not use open, dignified, judicious methods. These are all points that you really know, and you will agree with me when I

say that an expert should collect the money in a thoroly frank, businesslike manner, and make a friend of every man he encounters. The debtor of today *may* be the creditor of tomorrow, and my idea is to build a reputation at every step for expert collection service.

From the standpoint of clearness and visualization, the letter is exceptionally good.

Clearness is often to be obtained only by means of repetition and emphasis of the main thought. This is especially true when the letter covers two or more pages. To give a unity of effect it may be necessary to repeat the main points once or twice and sum them up in conclusion.

7. *When credibility is clearness.*—To be clear means also to be proved. Confidence is not secured without evidence. Facts are evidence and they must be presented clearly. Hence, clearness suggests credibility. Nine times out of ten a letter that is not clear is not credible.

An advertising writer says:

My own training has convinced me that it is better to leave out a point unless it carries conviction in itself, or unless you prove it in some way, and it may take too much time or space or distract the interest of the reader from the main point to do it. To go a step further, it seems to me, and advertising practice apparently shows it, that even tho a statement is true, it should not be made if it *seems* unbelievable. I remember years ago writing an advertisement for a cracker bakery in which I brought out the point that it had paid a certain large sum of money for a recipe for one of their crackers. The sum was so large that people did not believe it. The whole advertisement was discredited, tho the statement, as said, was true.

8. *Clearness and brevity sometimes clash.*—Since clearness and brevity sometimes get in the way of each other, it is important to remember that at all times the right of way belongs to clearness. A certain business man always makes it a point to use at least twelve words in long telegrams, because, as he says, before he did this he had trouble with his telegrams not being clear and detailed.

Another man, a very big executive, says that he has lost thousands of dollars during his business career thru the failure of his assistants to make their telegrams understandable.

What applies to telegrams is equally true of letters. To save time in dictation at the expense of understanding and possible sales or good-will is absurd.

One of the happiest devices for increasing the clearness of a proposition and yet at the same time reducing the length of a letter, when it can be done, is to take the facts out of it and put them in a memorandum, folder or booklet to accompany it. Each part of the message then gets more attention than the letter alone did before.

9. *Letter should be Complete and Concise.*—Following clearness as an indispensable characteristic of a good presentation come *completeness* and *conciseness.* Here is a letter which illustrates all three qualities:

You will no doubt include in the changes and additions that you are making to your plant a system of Scientific Illumination.

It has been the experience of plants that have installed a system of Holophane Scientific Illumination that the following benefits result:

1. Increased production, 10 per cent
2. Decreased spoilage, 25 per cent
3. Fewer accidents, 24 per cent
4. 24 hours' utilization of facilities
5. Reduced labor turnover
6. Better workmanship.

Holophane Scientific Illumination—the best for the least cost—will give you these benefits at a cost of less than one per cent of the pay-roll. This means that spending 5 cents a day on a $5.00 workman you can increase his output 10 per cent, decrease his spoilage 25 per cent and reduce his chance of injury 24 per cent. You can also run a night shift at daylight efficiency.

Without cost or obligation to you, let Holophane Engineers give you the benefit of their twenty years' experience by making complete specifications and plans for the Scientific Illumination of your plant.

This letter took the place in mail solicitation of a two-page letter which was so sprinkled with "we think," "we believe," "we understand," "perhaps" and "probably," that it was a wonder that it brought in any business at all. "Don't we *know* anything?" asked the manager, and had it rewritten in the above form. Then it produced splendid results.

The reasons are plain. The letter is clear even to "painting the picture" of the "changes and additions you are making in your plant" and of the "system of scientific illumination that will be included."

The clearness is due in large part to the presentation being *complete*. It has all the story it was neces-

sary to tell, all the essential facts. There is an implication of unlimited information to come, if it is desired.

10. *What completeness depends on.*—Completeness necessarily has reference to the nature of the letter and the proposition. The letter quoted is a "rake" or inquiry-seeking letter and therefore needs fewer facts than it would need if it were an order-seeking letter.

Completeness depends also on conditions. Ordinarily a reader is suspicious when exact figures are not given or precise statements made. At other times he would be annoyed at having to read a mass of detail. How much to tell and how much to leave out are matters of judgment and can only be learned by experience.

11. *Conciseness, an effect of definiteness.*—Conciseness is the effect of being direct, definite, exact. It does not mean absolute brevity, but facts briefly stated. There may be more real economy of words and ideas in a long letter than in a short letter; it depends on the subject and how much the reader already knows about it. The letter just quoted was concise. So was a letter from a city shirt-maker to his patrons. Under his name on the letterhead were the words: "Just arrived," and in a small transparent paper envelope tipped to the sheet were samples of six or eight silk shirtings and the prices. What more was necessary? The letter was very successful.

12. *Letter should be Correct.*—Last of all in the list, tho not necessarily last in importance, comes the characteristic of *correctness.* The good letter is obviously correct at all points, and these points include the tone or spirit of the letter from the reader's point of view, which has already been considered; the reader's interests; soundness of policy and safety of statement, as seen from the house's standpoint; considerations of common sense and business judgment, which the reader of the Text must be supposed to possess; and then, in addition, the practical interests of logic, rhetoric and grammar, which have been touched upon before and will be mentioned again later on, but need a word or two of attention at this point.

When a letter starts in to prove one proposition and ends up trying to prove something else, that is not logical. When a letter sounds weak, as often as not the trouble is with the logic; the presentation doesn't hang together. If fine writing does not convince, it may be because the appeal is to the literary and not to the buying sense. That is not logical.

A knowledge of logic will not take the place of common sense and business judgment; it will not help a correspondent to frame a good proposition; but when he already has the proposition and the facts it will save him from making an unsound use of them.

The matter of unity and coherence, just touched upon, involves the art of rhetoric. A presentation cannot drift if our mind is fixed on oneness of effect,

and sentences cannot run wild when in writing one we look back each time on the last and forward to the next, always getting the thoughts together that belong together.

13. *Should letters be "talked" or "written?"*—With the subject of rhetoric, we come to the question of selecting and handling words and ideas to express what has already been decided upon in our mind. At this point we encounter a problem. There is a considerable difference of opinion among business men as to whether letters should be "talked" or "written"; that is, left colloquial, or worked up into a more considered form. Should we dictate as we talk in every-day life, which to some of us would mean being wordy, wandering and perhaps slangy, or shall we try to make our message direct, concise, without necessary verbiage? Shall we lean toward the natural, or towards the efficient—which seems better?

14. *Taking middle ground on the question.*—On reflection, it will probably not seem necessary that there should be any real conflict between the two theories. The good letter should be as efficient in expression as the field will stand, but also as natural. A letter of otherwise deadly precision may be relieved by deft touches of humanness. Rhetoric makes no demand that a presentation should be formal. It depends, according to rhetoric as well as common sense, on what the reader wants. If he wants dignity, by all means give him dignity. If he wants straight facts, let him have them. Those who like easy, flow-

ing, natural, more or less colloquial style—and most do—ought to get it.

It is sometimes asserted that there is more life, "red blood" and "punch" in letters that talk instead of those that unfold. It does not follow. The most powerful messages we know were composed, not just talked out. The works of the novelists, poets, dramatists, orators, our chief English version of the Bible, were all written and rewritten, again and again.

15. *Naturalness must be slaved for.*—No doubt it is true—and the thought is suggestive—that the expression should be as natural as the matter allows it to be. But naturalness, as most writers can testify, comes only after experience. The advertising agent who worked over his letter until he got it in what he thought was the right shape and then talked it over the telephone to a prospective customer to see how it sounded had the right idea. To get a spontaneous, right reaction we must calculate the ends and means. To be natural, our impromptu must be carefully prepared.

16. *Right thoughts and words in right order.*—The facts and thoughts in a letter should enter the reader's mind in the right, the correct, order, otherwise there is confusion in understanding them. They may be vitalized by the simple artifice of choosing words and phrases that make pictures and set the reader's imagination on fire with interest. It is only

thru words that the message can be delivered; without the right words in the right order, all the good of the planning may be lost.

An advertising writer, in describing his method of reading a letter, speaks of "stabbing" the page here and there with rapid glances that take in a phrase or two at a time. In this way he decides whether he is interested in going on. Most of us do something of the sort. Few really start at the beginning of a letter and read steadily thru it without having stolen a glance at the signature and the last paragraph. Most executives, unless gripped at the start, savor the paragraphs by reading the first line or two of each. If there are no red-blooded words or ideas on top, down goes the letter into the waste-basket.

17. *Putting wings on the words.*—The way to guard against this danger of curt dismissal is to put wings on the words, as the poet Homer said and did, and make them fly, instead of creep, stagger or stumble, to their goal. By "winged words," Homer chiefly meant nobility of speech, but he also must have intended "godlike" clearness. He will probably not turn in his grave if we borrow the phrase to signify both.

The "winged word," then, in every case is the *correct* word, the one that helps the picture and quickens understanding. We are going into this in a later chapter and so need do no more now than tie a mental string on our finger with this extract from a letter, which after quoting a remark by a certain business

man, went on to say:

> We were sorry to hear him say it because he was too big a man to be puckered up with an idea so small.

"Puckered" is a "winged word." A *correct* word, too, because it gives a vivid picture that explains the thought as no other kind of word could do. In a way, all the words of that sentence are "winged" words. They move fast; we understand them and the sense of the whole without an effort. In business correspondence, at all events, that is good writing.

The formula of the "Seven C's" has given us a one-way cross-section of the good letter. In the next chapter, we shall take another section and discuss other formulas.

## REVIEW

What do you understand by imagination?

How can you at the same time use both facts and imagination?

Does one exclude the other?

Have you used facts with imagination in your recent letters?

Writers on rhetoric classify the desired qualities of a composition under the head of "clearness, force and beauty," or "clearness, force and ease" or "clearness and interest." Compare these aims with each other and with the "Seven C's."

Is it logical to speak of "studying" to attain a "natural" style of letter writing? If so, what does it mean to be "natural?"

What is meant by the "right word in the right place?"

# CHAPTER IX

## THE AID OF FORMULA IN PRESENTATION

1. *Sales formula helpful as far as it goes.*—We were reminded in the previous chapter that the order in which the ideas are arranged has a great deal to do with making the presentation effective. Let us look further into the matter.

Since every letter has sales quality in some degree and is, in fact, an advertisement to obtain either direct action or future good-will, the presentation of its proposition must, as we found, go thru the recognized steps of getting the reader's attention, interest, desire and favorable decision. The formula, which seems to have originated with Arthur Sheldon, has won a deserved place for itself in sales and advertising practice, but is not a complete explanation and as a formula does not suggest some of the most important requirements in letter writing. Probably no one formula could do so. It is the function of most formulas to be reminiscent rather than descriptive. Only after we know the process does the formula generally mean anything.

2. *What actual process of selling is.*—The process of persuasion, whether for buying or for any other purpose, is a communication of something from one

mind to another. What is communicated in correspondence? Not the actual letter, of course, nor the words, nor even the thought, if we are to believe the men of science. They tell us that all that is really communicated in any case is an impulse, something like the electric current in a wire. A series of vibrations from one mind sets the other mind in motion. The written words cause a sort of jar of consciousness in the receiving mind, the jar starts up a group of ideas and pictures suggested by the words, and these in turn, if personal, let loose a flood of feeling which settles the matter one way or the other in accordance with the character and experience of the mind.

Suppose the writer wishes to sell an article; the process is somewhat as follows: He first conceives a proposition, then reduces it to words, puts it in a letter and sends it to the reader. If the words make the proposition clear and it is one that appeals to the latter his feelings are stirred and his desire to buy is set in motion. The process ends in the reverse order from that in which it began, thus:

Desire—feeling—thought—words—thought—feeling—desire.

3. *Two sets of feelings, thoughts, words.*—What we are to note, however, is that the first and last desires are not the same, nor the first and last thoughts. Say that the article in question is an automobile. The writer wishes to sell the car and get a good price for it. That is his desire and what he first thinks of.

But that is not what he tells his prospect, because that feeling would never sell a car. Instead, he tries to anticipate the reader's point of view. He considers what would please him, thinks up a proposition and puts it into words. If the thought conveyed by the words is agreeable to the reader—say, owning and driving a car of the sort described—then his feelings are stirred, and if the feeling is strong enough he buys. Thus, to be clear, we should put it in about this way:

The *writer's* feeling, thought, words, change to the *reader's* words, thought, feeling.

Precisely how does the change come about? The critical point is the words. We say that the writer's words change to the reader's words, because that, in effect, is just what happens—what has to happen. As a matter of fact, how can any words mean exactly the same thing to two different minds? Take the commonest terms. To one man "office" signifies a dark hole in the wall with littered desk and dusty shelves, because those are his daily surroundings. If you mention "office" to him that is what he instinctively thinks of. To another man the same two syllables call up in mind a fine, spacious, handsomely furnished place with all the conveniences of modern business and a room full of willing assistants. One man likes his office, the other may loathe his. The word starts a train of agreeable thought in one mind and is a subject of irritation to the other.

In the same way a man who does not like dogs may,

when the word "dog" is spoken, get a quick mental picture of an ill-fed, cringing mongrel that once snapped at him. Another thinks instantly of the clean, bright, fearless little Irish terrier that nightly watches for his return home.

The experience of these two men with reference to "office" and "dog" is totally different; consequently the practical meaning of the words in their minds is different and the mention of them evokes different responses.

When the words are of a more general and abstract nature, like "patriotism," "duty" and "war," people may, as we say, be miles apart in their conception of them.

4. *Feelings and ideas change with experience.*— This matter of the difference in our understanding of words would in any event be very important for a letter writer to take note of. It is still more important to consider because of a further complication. Our experience as individuals goes on all the time and our ideas are constantly growing or changing to keep pace with it. The words to cover the experience do not change, but the meanings do. Hence, hardly any word means exactly the same to us any two years running. The change is so gradual that we are hardly conscious of it. We can only be sure it is taking place by comparing our thoughts as boys and as men, or as untrained workers and as executives. The number of words in use does not change so much between, say, twenty and forty years of age;

it is the meanings that change. The same words have to do duty for a vastly greater number of things.

5. *Not our words, but the other man's.*—This, as said, complicates matters, but it also suggests the explanation of them. What we mean by "communicating" a message to others in a letter is not using words that have the same significance to both of us; not necessarily using "our" words at all, but figuratively and literally "theirs," because it is their reaction we want and not our own. Thus the art of letter writing, so far as the use of words is concerned, is not the simple matter of finding out what we ourselves may feel like saying, or getting what Cyrus H. K. Curtis, the publisher, calls a "nice little mess of words" out of the dictionary. It is a question, rather, of studying human nature, our market and the individuals in it, and finding out what kinds of words will make them react the way we want them to. When we want to sell goods, we take pains to offer the people what they want. In a precisely similar manner, when we wish to persuade or convince people, we must take pains to offer them the *words and ideas* they want.

6. *Proof of this seen in expert writing.*—It is easy to see that it helps a great deal when a writer belongs mentally, morally and socially to the class of people that he is addressing, because he will not only know them from observation, but he will understand their wants and desires instinctively and sympathize with them. At the same time, it is possible for a skilled

letter writer, feeling no sympathy whatever with his people or his proposition, to secure extraordinarily satisfactory results by what seems a mere manipulation of words.

The explanation is that the words and ideas he uses are not his own, but the "people's" words and ideas, as he knows them by experience. They unlock the doors to people's feelings, in precisely the same way as if he were the most sincere, enthusiastic writer going. The ability lasts, of course, only as long as they believe him sincere. It is hardly necessary to say that the best results will be obtained when skill goes hand in hand with honest enthusiasm.

7. *Important to consider each element.*—With the relation of words, thoughts and feelings to both the writer and the reader understood, it is plain that due attention must be given to each.

A writer, for example, may have plenty of feeling for himself, but lack sympathy with the "other man" and hence fail to understand his point of view. That is the trouble with many letters.

Or the writer may appreciate the other man's point of view, but fail to develop a proposition to meet it. This would be the case if a product were obviously too high-priced—it would be hard to justify that, or cover it up.

Or the writer may have an excellent article to sell at a fair price, be enthusiastic over it, conceive a wonderful selling proposition and yet be unable to express himself in a convincing way. He may be so

enthusiastic that he will "talk himself out" of the sale.

These mistakes will not be made if the writer realizes the process of communication and the part that words, facts, ideas and mental pictures play in connection with the sales formula of Attention, Interest, Desire, Decision, to which we may now turn back for a more careful analysis.

8. *Back of Attention is Curiosity.*—What is it that gets Attention and arouses interest to the pitch of desire and decision? First, what is Attention? No elaborate explanation is required. Attention, of course, is curiosity fixed on something. To get attention we must appeal to Curiosity.

Now, is it not true that we are seldom curious about people or things that seem always the same? Is it not only when people do something different and our surroundings change that our curiosity in regard to them revives?

It is the same with old words, old thoughts, old facts, old ideas; we get tired of hearing and seeing them and lose the ability to react. To awaken our curiosity in a letter, therefore, we must be made conscious of something different, either in the facts or in the words. We must be told something that is new either in matter or manner. It doesn't have to be striking. A very slight change is often enough; for example, an announcement of new goods, or new prices, or a new campaign, or very simply, an interesting statement.

As an example of the latter, which is the common need in correspondence, take the following first paragraph of a fish market's letter, quoted in the compilation of "Letters that Make Good."

A salt mackerel, freshened to your taste, broiled to a rich brown and served with the juice dripping from it, with melted butter, is a breakfast dish that will almost melt in your mouth.

This is visualization with a vengeance, but it is not the visualization as such that awakens curiosity and secures attention. If we had read that somewhere else, say in a cook book, it would hardly stop us. But in a letter from a tradesman! "How unusual!" we say, and go on to the last line.

Another opening—

There are three things that you are constantly striving to accomplish—

Can you lay down the letter until you find out whether those "three things" are "old stuff," or not?

On the other hand, too great novelty in a presentation shoots over the reader's head. To most of us ten years ago the airplane meant nothing and consequently a reference to flying machines in a letter at that time would have been thought eccentric. The airplane is still a novelty, but we now see a connection with our lives, we recognize the *old* in the new.

9. *Behind Interest is Understanding.*—The second step of the formula is Interest. What procures that?

The answer has been that it is prolonged attention. Well, we ask, what is it that prolongs attention? Reflection shows that it is the appreciation of the nature and extent of the *new* and its vital relation to the *old*. The more the character, extent and vital relation are understood, the greater must be the interest. That's the second step: interest is increased by Understanding.

10. *Behind Desire is Confidence.*—The third step of the sales formula is Desire. What starts desire?

Evidently, we may give attention to and even be greatly interested in an article and yet not positively wish to possess it. We may not be convinced that it is as represented or that it will fit our needs. Not until we have full confidence in it will we buy. That is the third step; desire is preceded and brought about by Confidence.

11. *Behind Decision is Choice.*—The last step of the sales formula is Decision. What is it that makes a man act?

Nearly all of us are limited in income, time and energy. We cannot afford everything we want at the time we want it. To buy one thing, we must forego another. We must, in short, make a choice among alternatives. That is the last step—Choice precedes decision. It may not actually compel decision. Some urging or inducement may be required to effect it, but at least it is never given until the alternatives are cleared out of the way, and nothing else is left to do except agree.

Let us restate the two formulas combined:

(Curiosity) Attention—(Understanding) Interest —(Confidence) Desire—(Choice) Decision.

12. *Second formula broadly true.*—It may be said that many sales are made by letter without the proposition being understood. That is true. There are other ways of creating confidence than by explanation and a truthful recital of facts. Misrepresentation will have the same effect as truth-telling, the first time, or for a while. An appeal to the emotions may be effective even tho the explanation is imperfect. And the reader may have such confidence in the writer that he will hardly trouble to consider or even read the explanation.

Naturally, if the confidence is misplaced, the sale may be canceled, or the agreement nullified, and the good-will destroyed. Therefore, if by a sale we mean a permanent sale, one that satisfies and leads to further business, then it is strictly true that there must be something in the nature of understanding, either of the proposition or the men behind it.

13. *Formula from the writer's viewpoint.*—The mental steps pictured in the two formulas above mentioned are the reader's. What are the corresponding steps in the writer's mind? We need to know that also.

We got an inkling of them in the previous explanation. That which piques curiosity is always the *new* in the old, or the *old* in the new. What brings about understanding is *explanation.* What establishes confidence is *proof.* And what renders a choice possible

is the *elimination of alternatives.* Thus a new formula:

New-old—Explanation—Proof—Elimination.

The new formula is fairly plain. But there remain some questions. What do we mean by New-old? Not, of course, any kind of new-old idea. It must have some relation to the proposition, to the writer's and reader's wants that we found had in some manner to be harmonized.

Let us see if we can go a step further back.

14. *Backbone of the letter is an argument.*— Every letter we write is a request to do something: to buy, to sell, to think, to pay, to obey. Whether or not it is technically a sales letter, it actually is a selling letter if it attempts to persuade the reader to do or think something the writer wants; it is a request. Very well, back of the request, either explicit or implied, is an argument. The argument is written around the request. Whether or not it is actually expressed, the writer writes and the reader reads with it in mind.

The general idea of any letter, as the writer may formulate it, is this: "I want you to do thus and so, because such and such;" etc. If it is a sales letter he thinks, "I want you to buy, because this article (or service) is excellent and fair priced." If it is a buying letter the buyer thinks, "I want you to sell me that, because I will give you as much or more than any one else, and will buy more." If it is a collection letter, the collection manager thinks, "I want you to

settle up, because you owe the money and ought to pay."

15. *Argument has a right and a wrong order of thought.*—The words given will not be used, but that is about the manner in which any of the men would frame it in their own minds. It is also the natural order. As individuals we always put ourselves first —"*I* want." The effective way, however, to write a letter is not, as we found, to exalt ourselves, but, on the contrary, to give the center of the stage to the reader.

Restating the argument, then, from the reader's point of view, we get this: "You ought to buy (or you want to buy) because the goods are excellent and low-priced and because others have bought them." If these others who have bought are people whom the reader knows and respects, the people of his own class, who are successful, their testimony will have an influence over his mind because it is proof of actual need and its satisfaction.

16. *Putting it fully and logically.*—This way of stating a proposition, while the common way, is not complete. It leaves out an important thought—according to logic, the fundamental one in a proposition. When we say in a sales letter, "You ought to buy, because this is the best," we imply there is some sort of obligation to buy the best. Put in logical form the proposition would read: "You want the best. This is the best. Therefore you want it." Or "You want the good things that others of your class,

*i. e.,* grocers, bankers, etc., have. Others of your class have this. Therefore you want it." Or "You want something as good as you had before, or better. This is better. Therefore you want it." Or "You want to do what others are doing. They are doing this. Therefore you want to do it." Similarly with cheaper goods, cheaper service, greater value, quality, etc.

In a collection letter the thought conveyed would be: "You want to do the right thing, *i. e.,* what other people of your class do. They pay their bills. Therefore you want to pay yours." Or "You ought to do the right thing," etc. Or as a last resort—"You've got to do the right thing. The right thing is to pay this bill. Therefore you've got to pay it."

In every letter which seeks to secure compliance with a request, the idea in the background always is: "You want or ought to do whatever is right and reasonable. This is right and reasonable. Therefore you want or ought to do it."

17. *Logical formula is General—Specific—Conclusion.*—It will be noticed that the nature of a logical proposition is to start with a statement so broad and authoritative that it will not be disputed. "All men are mortal" is the classical *major premise.* It makes what we call a general assertion. That is the reason it comes first, because it is general and indisputable. The next step is to show that the general idea includes a specific idea. "John is a man." That

is the *minor premise.* And the third step is the *conclusion* that since the general idea includes the specific idea, therefore whatever has been said about the general idea is also true of the specific. "Therefore John is mortal."

We arrive thus at the ancient formula of logic:

General—Specific—Conclusion; or
Rule—Case—Application,

as it is sometimes given.

18. *General statement must always be sound.*—Every letter writer of ability knows this formula by study, experience or intuition, and habitually applies it. He may not consciously consider it in every letter he writes, but it is in the back of his head all the time and guides his writing. He knows, for example, that if the thought runs, "You ought to do what I want. I want this done. Therefore you ought to do it,"—he knows that if that argument gets into his letter, the letter will fail. That kind of proposition is not a success in selling. It ought not to be used in collection letters, or in letters from executives to subordinates. The major premise is not sound. The proper foundation for asking compliance with any expressed wish is what is right, proper, fitting, as demonstrated by experience.

It is important, therefore, for the business man to be aware of the formula and be guided by it in his thinking. It is not necessary or even desirable to

follow it in writing, either by keeping all three parts, or by adhering to the order. That would make our letters too tedious.

The complete thought is not always expressed, because for one thing it is not always necessary to express it. We may, for example, say "Other manufacturers are using this machine with great success and you can do the same." But we do not undertake to tell him that he *ought* to do what others are doing. We may suggest that the successful experience of others is helpful for him, but mostly that is understood and taken for granted. If the reader belongs to an intelligent class, the thought is stronger for not being stated outright.

Many men, however, fail to realize that the experience of others in the same kind of work is for them a guide, more or less trustworthy, and in writing to these it is necessary to argue or demonstrate this simple truth. Then, too, many business men, tho of a higher type, are slow to grasp the fact that certain kinds of experience in other lines may be of great value to them in their own. Consequently this principle, too, must be asserted, explained and proved.

19. *Major thought often slighted.*—Even when the major premise or thought is used, "you want or ought to do what others of your class or business have found best," it is not always put first. It may be put at the close, in summing up, or it may merely be suggested.

20. *Conclusion, too, may be inferred.*—In the

same way that the leading thought is often inferred or suppressed, so the conclusion or application is frequently dispensed with or disguised and left to be inferred. Instead of saying, "Therefore you want it," the writer may leave the decision to the reader, perhaps with a suggestion as to the desirability or necessity of immediate attention. He may substitute for it the "close." But the thought, "you want it," is and must be there, all the stronger, perhaps, for not being explicitly stated, since readers are prone to resent the assumption, if too express.

21. *Specific thought always there.*—Whether the general thought and the conclusion appear or do not appear in the letter, the specific thought, of course, is always there. In the sales letter it is, "This is the article (or service) that has been so satisfactory." In the collection letter it is, "This is a just debt." In the adjustment letter it is, "This is the right settlement."

When the specific thought alone appears, the statement is an affirmation. Many arguments are made up chiefly of such affirmations, the other premise and the conclusion being omitted or inferred. This is the stronger way, when the reasoning is plain, as the reader's mind supplies all that is lacking and travels faster than if the argument were set out with tedious completeness. A series of strong affirmations, if the mind does not challenge them, is very impressive.

22. *Apparent exceptions really come under the rule.*—It may seem that this statement as to the log-

ical nature of the proposition in every letter is not universally true and that there are many exceptions to it. For example, we ask how a letter, say the bare statement of an account, can come under the rule. But a moment's reflection shows that the statement is merely a conventional abbreviation of a dunning letter, "You want to pay at once what you owe. You owe this. Therefore you want to pay this at once," or "You must pay what you owe," etc., etc. The logic is there, all the time, and if the debtor delays we make it plainer. The plainer, in fact, we wish to be, the more formal is our reasoning.

23. *Formula keeps a writer on the track.*—This explanation also disposes of the possible objection that a rule with so many seeming exceptions in reality offers very little assistance. The converse is true. At the root of all argument and reasoning is the formula. It cannot be ignored. Knowing it prevents stumbling and loss of convincingness. It saves a writer from wandering all over and around his subject. It encourages him to be direct and purposeful.

24. *Letter may be a chain of arguments.*—This knowledge would be important even if there were only one argument in a letter. In a long letter of the persuasive type there may be several or many arguments, linked one to the other. Not one point only, but several may have to be set out and be sustained by reasoning. The selling proposition will then be only one of a number of logical propositions. It may be the main argument on which all the others are

strung. It may also be the last, to which the others lead up.

Generally, it is the main argument. In this case its minor premise furnishes the ground for all the other arguments. That is because the minor premise deals with the specific subject, the goods which are offered for sale, the bill which is to be adjusted or paid, or perhaps the request which is made for credit.

25. *Subordinate argument more complete.*—But differing from the main proposition in this, each of the subordinate arguments will often have all three parts and if we examine enough letters we shall probably find that they follow the formal order and are not inverted as the selling proposition often is, even when complete. That is, we shall find first a general statement, then a specific one and lastly the conclusion.

The reason for this is not a matter of chance. It is due to the nature of the human mind. When we wish to introduce an argument we do not start with what is unknown or doubtful, but with what is *known* and *admitted* and then, with facts and arguments, we edge along towards what before would have been to our reader the *unknown* and *questionable.* We lead him from fact to fact and inference to inference until, at length, if we have made out a good case, he sees the proposition as we see it.

REVIEW

Trace the various steps of the mental process involved in the last letter you wrote from the time you first thought of writing it to the time of the reader's reply.

Explain how in this process "your" words change into "his" words.

How can you assure such a change taking place?

Apply the formula of Attention—Interest—Desire—Decision to the last letter you wrote. Then ascertain how you sought, consciously or unconsciously. to use the other formulas; for example, to secure Attention by arousing curiosity and doing that by means of a new-old thought.

Pick out the argument or arguments in the letter. Put them in logical form.

What is the main argument that carries the proposition?

# CHAPTER X

## APPLYING FORMULAS TO THE PRESENTATION

1. *When subordinate argument comes first.*—The point with which we closed the previous chapter, that, namely, of leading the reader from the known and admitted facts of his experience to the previously unknown and unappreciated position which the letter writer desires him to take is of great importance because of the following peculiar situation which comes up in virtually all letters that resort to argument and persuasion. We have at bottom a selling proposition, then on top of that we have a logical sales argument, and then again we have woven into this whatever other arguments may be necessary to piece the facts together. Nine times out of ten, the sales propsition comes last. In nearly all cases the sales argument is not set out in a formal way and we may have to think a minute in order to recognize it, so that the beginning and middle of most of the letters will necessarily consist of subordinate arguments, giving force to the sales argument and paving the way for the "big idea" that comes at the end. As we must go from the "known to the unknown," and as the "big idea" is naturally not known or appreciated by the reader, it must not be abruptly introduced. He must be allowed to approach it in the logical and natural

way. Its main points must be explained by facts that he is willing to accept.

In the light of all this, consider the following letter sent out to manufacturers of automobiles, tires and motor accessories by a company selling outdoor advertising:

They say that our biggest national weekly magazine covers the nation "like a blanket." Perhaps that's true. But one of the most irritating things in this cold world is a blanket that is either too thin or too short.

Our idea of the function of a blanket is that it must keep you covered and warm without any part of you left out to freeze.

Now let's see what sort of a covering this blanket offers to that part of the nation known as Greater New York.

Of the 5,963,595 people in New York City, just 87,590 of them buy the magazine referred to! Now spread that blanket thus:—

5,963,595
87,590

and you will find 5,876,005 people left completely out in the cold without a shred to cover them!

Another example: "Here's the typical list of magazines used by passenger car, truck, tire and accessory manufacturers:

| | *New York City Circulation* |
|---|---|
| A | 87,590 |
| B | 26,163 |
| C | 20,000 |
| D | 43,741 |
| E | 23,076 |
| F | 8,084 |
| Total | 208,654 |

But what's the use? New York City is a big town and if you want to blanket it you must have a big blanket. It can't be done with a doily: you can't dominate New York with a circulation of 208,000. Just think that at Times Square alone there are 202,866 pedestrians passing daily from 8.30 A. M. to 6:30 P. M. Few advertisers include all the above magazines on their schedules, but even if they used them all the effect on New York would be less than that of a flea bite on the hide of an elephant.

Of course there is a way to get all of the circulation of New York and to dominate it in an advertising way:

*Outdoor Advertising: Painted Display in the City, on the Touring Roads Leading to New York: Railroad Bulletins: Painted Walls and Wall Panels:*

But you don't have to use them all to get all of the circulation of the city.

One-half of the $13,000 it would cost you to take a page each in those six leading magazines for one issue will get you more assured circulation of the right kind in New York than you can possibly secure thru any other medium.

We don't claim that every man who passes one of our outdoor painted displays comes to a dead stop and reads it each time he passes by. We don't insist that every person in New York parades up and down in front of our displays from dawn until midnight. Not at all.

But we *do claim* that a reasonable number of painted displays located at eye-arresting points, artfully designed, well and attractively painted, will in a short time be seen and read by most of the people of New York. Read not once, but many times during the course of the year.

Outdoor advertising insures you concentrated, localized publicity with no waste circulation, at the minimum of expense.

We would like to show you actual statistics on traffic circulation: the number of human beings who daily pass by corners and locations where we maintain displays; figures that will interest you.

If you want to blanket the greatest market in the world,

or if you merely want to cover Manhattan alone, or Brooklyn alone, or the Bronx, we have the medium, we have the locations, plus the service that can accomplish the act for you.

May we hear from you?

The sales proposition is given, without price or terms, in the latter half of the letter. The sales argument formally stated is: "You want to reach the greatest number of people in New York at the lowest cost. Our outdoor advertising will do that for you. Therefore you want it." But as that was a very old thought to the manufacturers addressed and was either not believed or not appreciated, the writer felt it necessary to freshen and magnetize it with new ideas and pictures.

Inspiration was found in a comparison of "circulation" figures for outdoor advertising and its magazine rivals. But this, too, is an old story to many manufacturers; they either don't understand or don't appreciate it. So the writer went a step further and instead of offering a bald presentation of advertising figures, which might be questioned or passed over by the reader, he introduced the idea of a "blanket," a simile which had been used in connection with a national magazine, and he pictured the blanket that is either too thin or too short. We all know about such blankets and from the depth of tragical memories admit the force of the argument as to what a real blanket should do.

This is opening with a "known and admitted" sub-

ordinate argument. It is connected by another argument with the magazine figures, these in turn are analyzed by further argument, and so the general sales argument moves by subordinate argument and fact on to the general conclusion.

Thus handled, an argument may be very interesting indeed, as this letter undoubtedly was to the advertiser who received it.

2. *Opening statements are of many types.*—These known and admitted opening statements which we found to be, in a logical sense, all general assertions, either arguments or parts of arguments, are of many different kinds.

The most striking are naturally those that mean most to the reader. We are all keenly interested in getting new business and appreciate information that points out the way to do it. All letters that start out with vital information will get attention and favorable consideration. There is nothing showy about them and so we do not generally find them reproduced in published collections of letters, but they make up a large proportion of the correspondence between houses and their customers in what are called the technical lines, such as engineering, building, iron, steel, concrete, etc., and they are undoubtedly very effective. The houses are on the alert for all news that may be of importance to their customers and pass it along. The news may be the letting of a big contract for building, the suggestion of a government project, changes in the personnel of big houses that

may indicate a shift of policy, a new technical discovery that will eventually affect a whole industry, results of technical experiments, new methods—anything that is helpful.

Hardly less valuable is the opening statement which hands on a suggestion for the improvement of business, a short cut in office or factory routine, or clippings from business papers and references to important business articles. These all offer ideal methods of approach to the other man. They are all generalizations leading up to or suggesting the main argument. "We do this for you," and "You will do something in return" are subordinate ideas, unexpressed but to be read between the lines, that pave the way to the sales talk.

The opening again may be a statistical fact which has a bearing on the customer's business or on the subject, such as this extract from a letter to farmers and investors. "In 1900 the value of an acre of corn was $8.50. Now it is $14.50—an increase of 74%."

It may be evidence, or testimony of satisfaction.

Incidents, actual or imaginary, furnish ingenious generalizations. They put life into the opening.

Analytic openings are often attractive; they are generally stronger when put in the question form: "Is your time worth anything?"

Still further down the scale are the openings with truisms, such as "Thirty days hath September, April, June and November—and thirty days have we waited." Even a platitude like "Nothing succeeds

like success" gets new force if linked up with a live interest.

These openings are all of a general nature. They are parts of a subordinate argument introducing the main thought. Knowing this, as we shall see later, is of great assistance in building our letter.

3. *Generalization masquerading as specific.*—Sometimes by referring to "you" the opening statement at first thought appears to be a specific one. "Can you put your finger on just the record you want, instantly?" or "If you saw an employe throwing fifty cents out of the window, you'd be 'jarred,' to say the least." Nevertheless, it is not really a specific statement at all, but a generalization in disguise. The specific statement would be an answer to the question, "What is this specific filing system?" or "What is the specific waste in my office or plant that you can eliminate?"

4. *Other openings are infrequent.*—Everything that does not relate specifically to the reader's choice or judgment is a generalization so far as that choice or judgment is concerned. If we wrote "Here's what you've been looking for," that would be specific. We should probably follow it up immediately with the general statement as to the kind of thing the reader had been looking for. And then nine times out of ten the specific statement would be repeated in some form before the conclusion was given.

In a similar way, a conclusion might be used to stir up interest, as "You want a——motor car," but we

should immediately add something like "Everybody does,"—a general statement—and amplify it by a description of the kind of a car they want and the kind of a car this is. "Consequently, you want a—— car."

5. *When generalization is designed.*—As a matter of logical necessity, therefore, most letters begin with a generalization. It may be dressed up for effect, as "See what the big retailers say of——," or "Mr. Blank, a leading merchant of——, was in town last week and paid me a call. Mr. Blank says," etc. A general statement, direct or introduced, is the regular opening, to be followed by the other two parts of the formula.

6. *May run true to form even in a short letter.*—See the following letter, which carried as an inclosure the advertising "jacket" for a "Brevity" book:

> Send a dollar for the book that belongs to this jacket.
> If book is not *better* than Jacket says, get dollar back—no time limit.
> A book for thinkers. You'll want to keep it.

In this letter the first paragraph is a direction. The introductory general idea is the paper "jacket" inclosed. The "jacket" sets up a standard thru the advertising claims printed on it. The suggestion that the book is better "than the jacket says" is part of this opening argument. The main or sales proposition is inferred in the last paragraph, "You want a book for thinkers. This is such a book. You want it." The letter is an interesting capitalization of the

brevity idea by the publishers of the "Brevity" books.

7. *Drawing a business parallel.*—The letter below is one of a series of successful form letters prepared by a tire manufacturer for his dealers to send out to local owners of cars:

If a customer owes you a bill you can take his note and you *may* get your money. If he gives you a certified check, you've *got* your money.

The difference between —— Tires and other tires is the difference between a certified check and a promissory note. —— have gained their prestige by deeds, not words.

Getting right down to the meat in the cocoanut, when you buy a tire, you want mileage, not conversation. When we sell you a —— Tire we sell you mileage—not adjustments. Of course, if an adjustment becomes necessary (which is seldom), we make it without any quibbling or argument.

—— Tires have a habit of reeling off anywhere between eight and ten thousand miles and better; so when we guarantee them all the way from 6000 to 7500 miles we are not taking great chances; we are plain business men—not gamblers or philanthropists.

Of course, preaching never reformed any man entirely; it only starts his thinking process. After you have thought this over, see if you can find any tire manufacturer of responsibility who thinks enough of his goods to back them up with a mileage guarantee equal to that of ——. If you can't find one, there must be a reason.

Let us put one —— Tire on your car, and the reason will become so evident that we'll never have to solicit your patronage again; you'll just naturally come around and buy ——, that's all.

The first paragraph is introductory—a general subordinate argument of the "known and admitted" kind.

The major premise of the real message is in the third paragraph, "When you buy a tire, you want mileage." The minor premise follows immediately, "When we sell you a——Tire, we sell you mileage." The conclusion, "Therefore you want what we sell," is not expressed, but is suggested in the last paragraph.

8. *When logical terms are mixed.*—The next letter, which was sent by a small city printer to large city business houses, is more complex.

We have gathered together here at Paradise a force of printing-craftsmen, of the type you used to know. Men who love their work, not their wages; who would rather have their home with a bit of garden after hours than walk the city streets.

We have assembled here at Paradise a printing plant which is mechanically complete. It has every appliance which will make for good work, and swift. And the machinery is not cramped, nor crowded into corners—there is plenty of elbow room for old-fashioned painstaking.

We have in constant use here at Paradise, storage facilities, which keep on hand a surplusage of paper and ink stocks. So that there is no necessity as some printers do of rushing to the paper house every day—and paying extra prices for small quantities and deliveries.

These are the three reasons why here at Paradise we can do your printing—whether it be a little run or a large one —a small size or a monster—with the smack of quality to it, and the price quite some lower than you would expect to pay for such good work.

Make us prove this with a quotation on that job you are planning. *Now. Ring or Write.*

Tho this is an interesting letter, probably most of us would feel that there is something wrong with it.

What, if anything, is the trouble? Is the opening part of the main argument out of place, or is it a subordinate argument in itself? Is it general or specific?

It is easy enough to find a lapse in the letter's rhetoric. The writer probably wrote the fourth paragraph first, say, as "There are three reasons," etc., and then the first, second and third paragraphs, much as they are now. That arrangement would have been natural and forceful. Afterwards, with the idea of securing more force, he inverted the order.

The effect of this, however, while it has brought an attractive paragraph to the top, was to thrust a number of relatively unimportant "we's" into the important beginning of the first three paragraphs. Coming after the fourth paragraph, their position would have been natural, but coming before it without the explanatory thought in that paragraph, they seem artificial and, still worse, kill the force of the "we" in the fourth paragraph as it stands. This is one explanation of our feeling in regard to the letter.

The logical explanation is at once the same and different. We may state the sales argument underlying the letter as about this: "The kind of plant that you would like to have do your printing is one that can do quality work at a low price. This is such a plant. Therefore you would like to have your printing done here." This does not cover the first three paragraphs. For that an introductory subordinate argument is needed. It may be stated as follows:

"The kind (or one kind) of plant that does quality work at low price is a plant that is operated by printing craftsmen who love their work more than their wages, etc. This plant is so operated, etc. Therefore it does quality work at a low price."

The first three paragraphs, then, are really parts of one general statement and the specific "we" and "Paradise" have no logical place in them. The letter might have read, "There is a place," etc., and then in the fourth paragraph, "That place is Paradise. Those workmen are ours, etc. They constitute three reasons, etc." Stated in this way the argument would have hung together and the letter would probably have been much stronger.

9. *Identifying the elusive generalization.*—The following paragraphs are the opening of a closely printed three-page letter:

No one man in this or any other country could ever tell the complete story of this stupendous war; therefore *The Literary Digest*, with its unparalleled facilities of direct information, reaching into every part of the world, has taken up this great work and has fused the stories of hundreds of men into one brilliant and complete narrative filling ten large volumes; and it is now planning a nation-wide distribution of them at a price so amazingly small that it will be possible for every American family, however moderate its resources, to claim one of the sets of this great War History. This letter gives *you* the earliest possible advance information of the plan.

It is the most marvelous war story in all the ages of the human race. For more than four fearful years the war swept furiously thru the continent of Europe and blazed in many parts of Africa and Asia. Thirty nations and scores

of different races were involved. Nearly ten million men were slain in battle. Thirty million were injured. Thousands were made blind or insane. One group of the latter, untamable at home, is organized for wild service in the Algerian deserts under the name "The Cohort of the Damned."

No country on earth escaped the losses and terrors of the war in some of their many forms. The high seas were ravaged, and thousands of ships were sent to the bottom. Millions of non-combatants—mothers, little children, nurses, teachers, and ministers of religion—were slain or suffered death by starvation and disease. And when the horror was at its height, when the world stood aghast, and the defenders of civilization were almost overwhelmed, America plunged into the hottest furnace of the war and snatched victory from the jaws of defeat!

Who would have believed such incredible things before they happened? Two million American boys were rushed across the dangerous seas to fight in France, and three millions more were ready to follow. Miracles of valor were wrought in foreign lands, by our own boys who but yesterday were quietly studying their schoolbooks, playing their football games, working in offices, or shops, or on farms here at home! And now thousands of those boys are lying under the troubled soil of France, and the French Government is to dedicate to them in perpetuity, a Field of Glory, a Mecca for Americans thru the ages to come!

It was highly desirable on account of the great length of the letter for the writer to give a clear idea of the nature of the business proposition in the very first paragraph, but even that desirability had to yield to the imperative necessity of getting the reader's attention with a thought that should grip.

The sales argument underlying the letter is essentially this: "Every American family should have a

good history of the great War. This is a good history. Therefore you, as an American, should have it." The proposition is not self-evident; it is to be proved. The writer must lead up to it with a subordinate argument which shall have the quality of being known and admittedly true. This initial proposition formally stated is: "A good history of this stupendous war can only be one that is written by many persons, who saw it from many angles. This is such a history. Therefore it is a good history." To get speed, however, the obvious second and third parts were dropped and the first part was expressed in a more forceful and elaborate way.

Below these two arguments in the letter are many others, not always appearing as arguments, but such in effect.

As a matter of fact, none of the assertions in the sales argument are made outright; each is inferred. Instead of them, we have fact piled upon fact, idea upon idea, until without the letter having done more than said that the price was so small as to make it "possible for every family" to own a set, the impression is nevertheless created that it is almost a moral obligation to do so.

The reason why the several steps of the main argugent were inferred and not formally stated is probably to be found in the character of the readers of the magazine. To tell them they should have a good history of the war without proving it would have been presumption. Proving it made it unnecessary to

make the assertion formally. The real argument is in the facts. Restrained presentation of the proposition actually strengthened it in the eyes of the readers.

10. *Logic not a handicap in writing or reading.*—Enough has been said to show that logic can be exceedingly helpful to the letter writer, and does not impose any unnecessary curb on his imagination. Logic, in fact, demands nothing more than a certain consistency of statement. If this is observed, the imagination and fancy may have free play. It even appears that the more the purely formal nature of the argument is disguised the more interesting and easy to read it is. All we need to do is to make sure that every thought develops rationally from the thought before.

11. *Readers are of two classes.*—Psychologists tell us there are two ways of reading. Words, we know, are names for things, that is, for ideas and for mental pictures of things—using pictures in the broad sense of representation of things seen, heard, touched, smelled, tasted. Probably ideas and such pictures were once the same thing. Even abstract words, like nobility and beauty, are always associated by us with some noble action or figure, some beautiful scene or face, otherwise we could not conceive them.

Each word or phrase we read, if it means anything to us, gives us a mental picture of some kind. The deeper our experience and the more pictorial the word, the more vivid the picture.

With men who read and think a great deal, the

pictures of ordinary objects and matters become less vivid, but more definite, conventional and useful; in effect, symbols which, coming and going quickly, lend themselves readily to rapid and close reasoning. Men of the type mentioned, lawyers, judges, scientists, prefer a close argument to any other form of exposition, because it is direct and time-saving.

The ordinary reader, however, is repelled by close reasoning. His mind cannot make up pictures fast enough to follow the argument. Perhaps he has no experience to correspond with the words used; if so, they suggest to him no pictures at all; and he tires of giving attention. The only kind of reading that he can grasp easily is the kind that we commonly say "leaves little to the imagination," but which really, on the contrary, by describing the thing as it is, sets his imagination going on the limited stock of "pictures" he possesses.

12. *Pictures satisfy both classes.*—In order to reach most readers and influence them, it is necessary, as we have seen, to describe or suggest concrete things. As these word pictures we speak of are as quickly understood by the higher as by the lower type of readers, we may safely conclude that practically all letters—those, at all events, that have an especially important task to do—should make it easy for the readers to see, that is, *picture,* the article or service, the conditions and the benefits, to be derived from its use.

13. *Picture, first term of new formula.*—As this

need is fundamental and as it starts with the first word of the letter, we may set down as the first term of a new formula the word *picture.* A vivid description makes plain the proposition and sparks the reader's imagination.

14. *After Picture, Promise.*—The proposition is an argument that refers to the future. It says that if the reader buys or does something, he will be better off. It promises. That is the second step—after Picture, *Promise.* Promise is even more important than Picture. It suggests a picture in itself.

15. *After Promise, Prove.*—As it would be asking a great deal of the reader to expect him to take our word altogether on trust, we feel it necessary to support our promise by some evidence to show that it will be carried out. It may be very poor evidence, it may even be only barely suggestive, but if the letter is a good one there will be an effort to prove something. *Prove* is the third step.

16. *Last of all, Push.*—Having pictured, promised and proved, there remains only one thing, if at all, to do, namely, to stir the reader to immediate decision, to compel him if possible to take action. Correspondents generally are more tactful about this than they used to be. "Do it now" is not so much in vogue. Some believe that if the letter as a whole has been handled right, the "punch" has been diffused all thru it and therefore it is enough to leave the matter courteously in the hands of the reader.

Much no doubt depends on the nature of the propo-

sition and whether you are dealing with customers who will "repeat," or with people you will never write again. Whatever the circumstances, almost always it is necessary to introduce the idea of urgency. It may run thru the whole letter or receive merely a mention in the concluding paragraph, but it should be presented. To preserve the alliteration in the formula we may call this step *Push*. Thus we have

Picture—Promise—Prove—Push.

17. *Summing up the formula.*—This gives us a series of formulas, which are by no means final and are not to be rigidly applied, but which, individually and as a whole, will probably be found helpful to correspondents, and especially in connection with letters which aim to persuade or convince. We may repeat them. First, the conventional sales formula:

Attention—Interest—Desire—Decision.

The same formula with each step explained:

New-old—Curiosity—*Attention.*
Explanation—Understanding—*Interest.*
Proof—Confidence—*Desire.*
Elimination of Alternatives—Choice—*Decision.*

The formula of logic:

General—Specific—Conclusion;—or
Rule—Case—Application.

A rhetorical formula:

Picture—Promise—Prove—Push.

To these let us add the other formula suggested by the definition of a good advertisement and equally true of a good letter: "What the writer wants to say and what the reader wants to read." The writer will first frame his proposition to suit himself or his house, then consider it carefully from the other man's point of view, choosing words, facts and illustrations that will make it vital (concrete) to the other man and making the presentation in general run along the lines suggested by the several formulas (correct). If he does this, he cannot go far wrong.

## REVIEW

How do you explain the fact that convincing letters are made up of arguments?

Why does the argument on the proposition generally come last?

Why is it generally unnecessary to state an argument in a formal way?

What makes an argument either interesting or uninteresting to the reader of a letter?

Does the use of reason interfere with the use of imagination, or vice versa?

How do you support an argument?

Analyze some of your recent letters and see what you think of the relative importance of the several steps in the "Picture—Promise—Prove—Push" formula.

# CHAPTER XI

## ROUTINE AND INDIVIDUAL LETTERS

1. *Routine may be good as well as poor.*—It is a hasty assumption, often made, that no letter should be a routine letter. Certainly there have to be letters that handle a given kind of situation over and over again. Many letters have to be dictated in a rapid, routine way; it is unavoidable in the pressure of business. It is not necessary, however, to have routine letters poor. If they cannot always be improved, they can be varied; tone, manner and content may be made less painfully rigid. We may even systematize the variation and make that a matter of routine, thus gaining some of the benefits of mass production in correspondence and saving some of the advantages of individual, personally dictated letters.

2. *Individualizing routine, standardizing personality.*—Seen from one point of view, the whole practice of handling correspondence, so far as there is improvement in it, is a double process of turning personal letters into routine, and routine letters into personal, putting the best thoughts that come out of the experience of dealing with individual cases into the common run of letters, to raise their level, and at the same time seeking new ways to shorten and standard-

ize the time-consuming methods of personal composition. The test of the letter always is what it does, and not how it was written. It gets its results by what has gone into it; and not by how it has gone in.

3. *Opportunities in both ways.*—The opportunities in letter writing come from both these ways, one of making the routine letter more flexible, human and productive and the other of making the personal letter more *systematically* personal. As soon as we realize the nature of the selling or good-will quality in so-called sales letters, we begin to see previously unsuspected ways of injecting it into buying letters, adjustment letters, traffic letters, letters with remittances, letters of introduction, recommendation, instruction, intercompany and interdepartmental letters, letters asking, giving and withholding information; "scout" or questionnaire letters, letters to salesmen, letters on delayed shipments, letters of explanation and apology—letters, in fact, of all descriptions.

We do not understand by this that every letter has to contain selling talk, or obvious little attentions and compliments. In every one, however, there is the chance of putting things in their most intelligible as well as most agreeable light. We can have a routine that is considerate as well as one that is dull, indifferent, and neglectful. We need not generalize on the point further than to remind ourselves that the better the so-called routine the less will be the need for individual and exceptional handling.

Most of the letters we have considered have been sales letters. Let us take up a few other types and see how far they are condemned to what has been called senseless routine, how far the routine may be good and worthy of standardization, and how far also it is necessary to have individual, original, "different" handling.

4. *Routine in requests for quotations.*—Here is a sample request for a quotation of price:

QUOTATION ON STEEL BALLS

Please quote us your best price and advise us how soon you can deliver these in lots of 1000 to 2000, ranging in sizes from 1½" to 2½".

We would make use of them in the centrifugal cups on the XC type of machine which you furnished us last year. The quality can be of any range from soft to hardened steel.

The question of delivery is highly important since our need is very urgent.

Considered from the viewpoint of the reader, what, if anything, does this leave to be desired? Why is it not as complete, correct, and courteous as need be? Is there anything that could be added without burdening the letter? We must remember that courtesy may be shown by restraint as well as by profession—a few lines of consideration are worth paragraphs of pretense. We shall probably agree, then, that there is no place here in which to inject the writer's or the house's claims to distinction, or to compel interest by quaint or unusual handling. It is evident that this type of letter has reached its present form by merit

and is well adapted to routine. Why, then, substantially change it?

5. *Reporting status of order.*—In the following letter, information concerning an order is given:

Yours July 23
File 504264–JAM
Status of Shipments

According to our records the following shipments of this order have been made:

Item #1—3 wheels shipped July 8—Adams Express
Item #2—2 wheels shipped July 5—Adams Express
Item #3—3 wheels shipped July 5—Adams Express
Item #4—2 wheels shipped June 10—Adams Express
2 wheels shipped June 27—Adams Express

This completes the order with the exception of one wheel on item #2. It finished in an unsatisfactory condition and we were obliged to start a new one in process to replace it. It is expected that this one will be ready for you about July 30.

We hope these shipments will reach you within a reasonable time.

Why is this letter not just about what the recipient would desire, both in matter and arrangement? Could we vary it greatly without making it less intelligible? Are not the order and arrangement virtually dictated by the nature of our minds? Is not the heading which gives the subject, the date of the addressee's letter and the file number of the case ideal? If so, we have routine, and a good one.

6. *Asking information about the order.*—The fol-

lowing came from the same company as the other two:

Your Order #18
January 3
Jimson Mfg. Co.

The eighth item on this order calls for six wheels 6×½×¾", #24 for high speed steel.

Before entering this item we would appreciate further information. Does the #24 refer to the grain size or is it used in connection with the material to be ground? It would be very unusual to furnish wheels of this size in grain 24 and we rather doubt that it is what would best fill your customer's needs.

Provided you cannot determine what the grain and grade should be, kindly let us have further details regarding the work for which the wheels are intended, making mention of the size and shape of the pieces to be ground, also the amount of stock to be removed and the finish required. With these details before us we will have no difficulty in selecting wheels of a suitable combination of grain and grade.

The remainder of the order has been entered and we will let you know in a later mail when we can make shipment. With the question of grain and grade settled, the eighth item also will be quickly entered for manufacture.

Clearness, completeness, simplicity and courtesy distinguish this letter. It seems to meet every need of the reader for facts. What would be lost by using it as a model, that is to say, standardizing the manner of handling for routine purposes?

7. *Routine requirements call for brevity.*—These three types of letters suggest that for each kind there is an ideal form which allows all possible information to be given in the briefest, most direct and intelligible

and therefore most helpful way. Where we are dealing with things like orders and shipments, which are sufficiently concrete to hold the reader's interest, we do not have to resort to other devices than clearness of expression and orderly arrangement. Neither can we strain for good-will; we are entitled to as much as we can get from a businesslike and courteous letter, and that is all.

8. *Handling salesmen by mail.*—A very important division of letter-writing that deserves more attention than it ordinarily gets from executives is the letters to traveling salesmen. These representatives of the house carry a heavy responsibility, and they can, all the more when young and not too experienced, be greatly helped by sympathetic handling.

9. *Taking pains to explain to men.*—The writer of the following letter, having had difficulty in getting daily reports from his 75 road salesmen, wrote them the following letter:

War is, without a doubt, all that the General claimed for it—and yet it has its helpful features. Like other clouds it has its point of silver. The particular point in mind is incorporated in what a Plattsburg student-officer, after a few weeks in camp, wrote back to his Sales Manager.

> "If I don't succeed in getting a commission, I feel that my time will be well spent, for I have learned a good many hard lessons, and I promise you that the next time you ask for reports you will get them, for I have found that our ideas of things do not compass all the moves in the game by any means."

The chances are against your taking a course at Platts-

burg or other army camp, but there is nothing to interfere with your profiting from the other man's experience. Our records here are not complete without a report from you daily as to the calls and sales made. Convenient forms are furnished—less than five minutes of your time each evening is required. They will be helpful to us here and indirectly helpful to you.

In addition to furnishing these, may we have from you a complete route sheet showing just where you expect to be each day?

"Where is Harris today?"

"When will Harris be in Anniston?"

"How soon can we expect your representative here?" are questions we can't answer without help from you. Merely a mail address is not enough. We should know where you actually are, or at least where you expect to be, every hour of the day.

Your coöperation in these instances will help us to do better work, and possibly, probably, will be money in your pocket in the long run.

The routine way of trying to get daily reports from salesmen is to insist, remind, wheedle, or beg. This takes too much time and effort, does not insure compliance and, worst of all, may confirm the salesman in his bad habits. The writer of the foregoing letter knew the simplest and best way to "sell" the salesmen on the idea was to make them see that it was mutually beneficial and a part of the business. He recognized that the job of doing that once and for all was just as important as any other he could handle and he put as much thought into the letter as he would have done in writing the house's best customer. It was successful. With the idea worked out, we can-

not see any reason why it should not be made routine in all houses to substitute for that other, helpless kind of routine.

10. *Salesmen appreciate constructive ideas.*—The following letter was written by the Sheldon School of Salesmanship to its field representatives:

Not long ago there lived in Italy a poor sailor who loved liberty. Not a very remarkable beginning, perhaps, but that man became one of the world's most successful military leaders.

He was outnumbered in almost every battle he fought, but he won. He won because he believed in himself and the cause he fought for, and he made his men believe in him. This poor sailor's name was Garibaldi.

Once, while fighting in South America, he was surprised by four of the enemy, all armed. Without hesitating a moment he jumped forward, drawing his sword. "Surrender!" he said. "I am Garibaldi." And the soldiers promptly dropped their rifles.

These sentences may explain why for years the name of Garibaldi and the sight of his red-shirted troops sufficed to put to flight three times his opposing army's own fighting force:

> "In all of my big battles the enemy was sure he had me. If I had been of a like mind, you would never have heard of Garibaldi. I snatch victory from defeat."

Remember that business is a battle of brains and that it is confidence that tilts the balance of victory.

But in all your mental combats never lose sight of the fact that you are fighting not to vanquish a hated foe but rather to win a new friend—to win your way into the other fellow's heart, to gain his confidence and get business.

And your most effective weapon is the law of non-resistance, backed by infinite patience, perseverence, an over-

whelming desire to do good, and belief in yourself and your proposition.

The letter is saved from being of the purely "pep" variety by the constructive thought in the last two paragraphs. It makes its appeal on what is undoubtedly the strongest ground to take in a case of this sort. Could this tone, or manner, or appeal be used in other lines? Could it be more or less systematized and made routine? Perhaps not, altogether. But the number of houses that are taking this tone and making their appeal on such grounds is constantly growing.

The old-fashioned "ginger" letter is going out of fashion. Salesmen have learned too much about it. It is too artificial to bite hard any longer. The newer idea is to reason things out with the salesman and get him to stand on his feet.

11. *Making constructive quality routine.*—The sales manager of a large educational organization handles his routine daily letter to salesmen in an individual way. Part of the letter he devotes to stimulative and constructive matter. This goes out in the same shape to all salesmen. It may be original thought, but more often is an extract from some newspaper or magazine article of a significant news or inspirational character, or a quotation from somebody's speech. Whatever the idea, it is up to the minute. The subject itself may have been scheduled weeks in advance. In the late spring, for example, the salesmen are primed with ideas and suggestions

for counteracting the "summer slump" to which so many salesmen give way. War conditions, the strikes, the general unrest, are similarly discounted. All conditions that threaten sales and sales efficiency are foreseen and met, so far as possible, by facts and arguments which the salesmen can use on themselves as well as on others.

The second part of the letter is personal. The manager or an assistant replies to the salesman's daily report, making a point to answer every question he has asked and refer to every idea in which the salesman shows he is interested. The manager congratulates or encourages, as the need calls for.

Recently as a means of still further stimulating and knitting the organization together he suggested that the salesmen themselves each write a letter to their brothers on the force. These letters were processed and sent out. One of them, with part of the personal matter sent by the sales manager to one of their salesmen, follows:

I learned quite early in my I—— career that going after enrolments just for the sake of quantity or a big check usually started a slump. I believe that to carry the message of the I—— to men is all I need to think about. The more men I sincerely try to help, the more money I will make as a reward for the good I have accomplished. Honestly, I seldom know how many enrolments I have or what the amount of my check will be. And, frankly, I don't care. "He profits most who serves best."

There are three reasons why a man enrols for the I——. These are: 1—His motive for enrolment; 2—Confidence in you as I—— representative; 3—Confidence in the I——.

The first he has to a degree before you see him or it can be developed by you.

The second is up to you. Truth, sincerity and the courage of your convictions are a few of the qualities you must possess to gain that confidence.

The third is helped by the indorsement letters and by reference to the Advisory Council and the Staff.

One thing I'm strong for is the idea of "plan your work then work your plan." Every night I route my calls for the next day and I follow that route. If it is a poor layout, I follow it just the same, but make a better one next time.

Prospects will never give out. It is all any of us can do to skim the surface. Therefore, I can't afford to waste my time thru lack of planning my work. No one ever saw me standing on a street corner wondering where to go next.

Another thing I follow in this connection is to call upon one man at a time. That is, while I'm talking to Mr. Prospect, he is the only man I have to see and I never hurry or think of the others I have planned to see. I will take care of them one at a time.

I always leave a man so that I can go back and get a welcome whether I have enrolled him or not. Prospects can give cooperation fully as well as subscribers.

Lastly, there is no substitute for hard work. You cannot enrol them unless you tell them your story.

Good luck, fellows, and if I can be of any assistance to you, let me know. My experience with the I—— is an open book for any member of the Peerless.

See you with no regrets at the Big Convention.

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Glad to see they're coming in bunches. Splendid work, R——, and not the less yours that you had such strong cooperation. If you hadn't deserved it, you wouldn't have had it.

Note what you say about J. D. of ——. Certainly we will give him what we can. I have put thru a memo. to B—— and he will start something direct to J. D. in a day or two. Etc. Etc.

12. *When a salesman weakens.*—The following was written to a young salesman out on the road who had sent his manager a disconsolate letter asking to be taken out of his territory and placed in a new one:

I am not surprised at your recent letter. In fact, I really expected it.

There are times in every salesman's career when the conditions under which he has to work day in and day out seem impregnable. There are times when he'd sell his job for two cents and consider it a good bargain.

And don't think I haven't been in just that frame of mind myself. Life is a pretty stiff kind of competition and we all are too much inclined to be like the proverbial mule that was always jumping the fence because the grass looked greener on the other side. The mule never learned the lesson that contentment is, after all, largely a frame of mind.

The point I'm trying to make is that the conditions confronting you in your territory are matched by the same, or others just as hard in every other territory. A transfer would not necessarily benefit you and if you are not man enough to fight it out in one section you might fail in another. Doesn't that sound logical?

Life on the road is not a bed of roses by any manner of means. Things don't come your way by sitting down and crying. It takes a high order of grit to be a successful salesman and it takes the "get-up-and-dust" spirit too.

Smith, you are a commercial soldier. If you were in a trench you might be discouraged often, but you'd fight. You are armed with weapons that spell success. You haven't any tin gun in the quality tire you are selling and you haven't any old mule for a captain in the policy and reputation of the house. You have the weapons and you know how to use them.

As for the "gyp" stuff, it doesn't warrant a serious thought. It can't give you real competition, because it

hasn't the staying qualities. They will be gone long before you are and you will live to see the day when the—— product with all it means will come out on top. We must depend on you to preach the true gospel. I've all kinds of confidence in you. I know you are equal to the task and I'm going to look forward to a big improvement in your reports from now on.

If it is worth while to keep a salesman, it is worth while to take time and patience to reason with him and nurse him along into confidence. Note how the letter follows the sales formula. Note the logic, also; the going from the known to the unknown, the generalization of the situation to take in all salesmen; the argument that the good ones get thru alive because they have confidence and that he, the reader, has no reason to lose confidence. Note the way the presentation is made concrete, candid, courteous, clear, etc.

13. *Inquiry for information that all answered.*— The following letter of inquiry for information went to 150 of the leading hotels in the Middle West and the East:

"What hotels will give me the best accommodations?"

Many times every day our men, starting out for different parts of the country, put that question to us. Because it has grown increasingly difficult of late to give an intelligent reply, we have decided to seek an answer directly from the hotels in towns our men visit most frequently.

Will you therefore be good enough to give us the following information:

1. Could we in sending our men to you be assured that they will be provided for?

2. What would be your rates for a pleasant room (single and double) with bath?

3. Would you wish any special means of identification for —— men, in order that they might benefit from the above?

Your interest and prompt reply will be appreciated.

This letter earned 100 per cent in replies, tho not all, of course, were favorable. How easy it would have been to write a stupid routine letter beginning: "We are desirous of knowing," etc. Instead of doing that the writer took pains to present the ideas in just about the order in which they could most easily be understood, dramatizing the "key" line by quotation and letting the questions at the end come naturally out of the situation.

14. *Good routine for asking information.*—A letter asking information is a nearer relative of the out and out sales letter than are most other types of letters. It asks, not for money, but for a service, and it is necessary to make it just as easy as possible for the reader to understand and to answer. As a rule it is well to inclose a stamped and addressed envelope. Ask as few questions as possible and frame them so that they may be answered briefly. If the reader can write the answers on a letter or an inclosed card, on a perforated margin or merely check the items listed, so much the better.

It is well to start our letter, when possible, with an incident or a reference to something in which we have reason to believe the reader has an interest and which will explain our writing:

Mr. H. T. McCord of Philadelphia and I have been com-

paring experiences on direct advertising costs and he tells me you have some very interesting data which you may be willing to let me have.

Such an introduction breaks the ice, humanizes the request and secures friendly attention.

15. *Make your apologies constructive.*—A letter of apology and explanation has to steer a narrow course between unwillingness and abjectness. See how it is done in this letter written by a western publisher.

Thru some oversight which I am utterly at a loss to explain, but which I am investigating, the letter which you mention in your letter of June 3rd failed to reach me. Otherwise, I should have promptly answered the inquiry which you made. I sincerely beg your pardon for the discourtesy that has been shown you. I hope to set it right now.

You want to know whether you can have the entire Course sent to you at once. You may. All that is necessary for you to do is to write me and tell me that it is your intention to subscribe for the Course as a whole instead of subscribing for it in units. On receipt of your letter I will send you the remaining lectures and lessons and all the working materials.

In this connection I suggest that you take advantage of our 5% discount for cash and pay in full for the Course. Thus the price to you becomes $33.25 instead of $35. As you study the Course be sure to write to me from time to time and allow me to assist you in problems of the Lectures and Lessons whenever they bother you.

The tone of the reply is excellent. The writer explains that the letter did not reach him, but accepts full responsibility for the mishap, and apologizes handsomely, even exaggerating the house's oversight

into a discourtesy. Then, as if to show that oversight and apology are not the routine of the office, the tone of the letter becomes brisk and businesslike. The concluding paragraph does not overdo the display of interest. Is not this about the order that ought to be followed in practically every case? Can we escape something like system in handling similar letters?

The matter is more important than many persons would think, because in many lines where collections are made by mail, especially in instalment lines, delinquents seize upon every possible reason to excuse or palliate their conduct and the writer must learn to make his apologies in a constructive way, accepting blame or seeming to do so and gradually bringing the delinquent to a sense of shame for his picayune evasions.

16. *Export letters after their own kind.*—Export letters are not different in principle from domestic sales letters, explained elsewhere in this Text and also at greater length in the volume on "Foreign Trade." The following is the first of two letters sent out by the Regal Shoe Company to select lists of names furnished by the Regal dealers in foreign cities:

For a generation our discriminating patrons have been men who, like yourself, insist on most careful attention to style and material.

Regal Shoes are the footwear of gentlemen. In every capital may be met men of many tongues linked by the common bond of good taste. Regal Shoes are style standards in New York—in Paris—in London.

Nor is their style the sole characteristic of their merit. In Regal Shoes is embodied all the shoecraft of the leading shoe center of the world. Their materials are selected from the choice of the best—their workmanship is finished. Their service in use is assured.

It is a pleasure, therefore, to tell you that we have recently delivered to Messrs. H. A. Badman & Co., the exclusive Regal dealers in Bangkok, a fine invoice of the new and commanding shoe styles of the year.

It will be observed that there is a little less keenness and somewhat more deference in the letter than is common in our domestic correspondence. The stationery was in keeping with the effort. The results from the letter were excellent.

The second letter in the follow-up to those who had not responded to the first invitation read as follows:

We take the liberty of requesting you to recall a letter which was sent to you some time since. Your name was on a very limited and exclusive list of gentlemen who were known to be of discriminating and authoritative taste in the matter of dress. Because of that fact, we took occasion to advise you of the delivery in Bangkok of a complete line of fine Regal Shoes, and to suggest that you call at the shop of Messrs. H. A. Badman & Co., to examine this Regal display.

We trust that you have already found it possible to avail yourself of that opportunity. If, however, your engagements hitherto have made it inconvenient, may we not suggest that you will surely afford yourself real pleasure and solid satisfaction by visiting at an early date the store of Messrs. H. A. Badman & Co., who will be greatly pleased to serve you?

Frankly, moreover, we shall count ourselves fortunate in the sure knowledge that the famous Regal shoes will appeal

to you, as they universally appeal to men of discrimination the world over.

Here the deference and complimentary tone are even more marked than in the first letter. The information in the first is repeated in the second to offset the possibility of it not having been seen or remembered. The two suggest a desirable routine.

17. *Different routine for different type.*—Letters are often classified according to their literary method instead of their function. There is the ordinary descriptive letter, the analytic letter, the chatty letter, the narrative letter, the "long-short" letter, the news letter, the intimate letter, the post-card message, card notices and so on. There are, too, printed letters multigraphed, processed or engraved, instead of typed.

18. *Narrative letter varies routine.*—Most of the terms are self-explanatory. The narrative letter which tells facts in a story way is increasingly popular on account of its readability:

You remember that when you were last in the city, you expressed an interest in that —— ——, but on account of the war we were unable to promise early delivery. Well, it just happens that last week we received an invoice of similar goods in even superior quality and patterns and I want to have you let me send you a trial order, which I know will open your eyes.

Another:

When we originated our plan to enable people to invest in first mortgages in New York City real estate by $200 certificates purchasable at the rate of $10 per month, it

was an experiment. In New York City where our business was already well known, we knew the plan would succeed; we were not so sure of the rest of the country.

More picturesque is this letter written by the president of the First National Bank of Belleville, Illinois:

The tinkling of the coins in the teller's window had ceased. Our men had left and the bank was closed for the night.

I stood alone in the bank and looked about. There was the massive, burglar-proof vault, guarding the savings of many of our people; there was the cashier's office and next to it the teller's window, at which you may sometimes stand to deposit or receive money.

And then I wondered if you knew how much one bank can help you in realizing your ambition, etc.

Sometimes the narrative style is "dramatized" by being put into sharp action and dialog, as in a letter sent out by an oil refiner, the opening of which is as follows:

It was in the Superintendent's office of a busy Buffalo shop, when the sudden slackening of the whirring wheels made him leap to his feet to peer thru the glass partition on the gathering workers in one of the aisles.

"Hot box on main shaft of milling department, Sir," reported the running messenger.

Touching the hurrying Superintendent on the arm, I reminded him that my life work was lubrication and perhaps I might be of some service. He grinned a welcome "surest thing you know" and led the way.

"Third time this week for a hot box in this end of the shop," spoke up the foreman. "Mebbe we'd better true up all our shafting."

19. *"Long-short" style worth cultivating.*—The "long-short" letter is a name suggested by a letter

specialist to cover the brief letter or note when it is made more than perfunctory by good-will. Some men who have scores of letters a day to dictate, manage to give them a turn, however brief, that makes a fine impression. A letter that Bailey, Banks and Biddle wrote a customer is quoted as a good example of how a house can do a simple thing in a big way. A silver teapot recently purchased had been damaged thru the carelessness of a maid and sent in for repairs. The house wrote this note:

> You have had the teapot such a short time that we don't feel you should pay anything for having the dent removed. We are glad to do this for you.

The act was kindly, but it is hard to believe it sprang wholly from impulse. We would expect all the house's acts and all of its notes and letters to be of the same agreeable character. Chance gives the occasion for them, but policy will prescribe the handling; the courtesy is ingrained and routine.

20. *Post card messages save time.*—The Curtis Publishing Company makes use of well-written postal card messages. Some other companies are using well-worded notices on cards, the cards now and then being engraved. These messages usually take the form of a short letter. They save the time that dictated letters require.

21. *Printed letter grows in popularity.*—The printed letter, whether printed on the Multigraph or on a job press, is coming into greater use, especially

for announcements to the trade and the sales organization. As long as it takes the form of a letter, the office man should be prepared to compose it effectively. Strong headlines and striking openings may be used just as in the case of periodical advertisements.

22. *To improve both routine and individual letters.*—This is the view taken by the best houses. On account of its very great opportunities, correspondence is worthy of endless pains. With these, the routine letter may more and more approach the standard of the individually composed letter and the individual letter in its turn be made systematically and inevitably more effective.

### REVIEW

What distinction would you draw between routine and individual letters?

How can you make poor routine letters better?

How can you make poor individual letters better?

Is there any difference in the methods?

What would be the point of view in each case?

Do the rules and formulas discussed in preceding chapters apply to narrative letters, to news letters, and to "long-short" letters?

Could you "dramatize" a narrative letter and at the same time unfold an argument? If so, how?

# CHAPTER XII

## ADJUSTING COMPLAINTS BY LETTER

1. *Complaints not always justifiable.*—There are very few business organizations that feel they can take the stand that the "customer is always right." The old attitude of "let the buyer look out for himself" was of course wrong. It is much sounder business to give the customer the benefit of the doubt. But it is only common sense, amply fortified by experience, that customers may be thoroly sincere and well intentioned and yet be both mistaken and unreasonable. This is particularly the case with classes that have had no business training, like housewives and professional people, but is by no means confined to them. In short, some complaints are justified, but others on their face are unjustifiable, and in still other cases it is impossible without further information to tell whether they are either one or the other. All of these cases cannot be handled in the same way.

2. *But customer must be kept, if possible.*—The protection of the house is not the only consideration. Sometimes it is of secondary importance. The customer must, if possible, be kept. It is easier to keep old customers than to get new ones, and the way to keep them is by making prompt and courteous ad-

justments where the house is at fault, and where it is not, by making prompt, tactful and friendly explanations.

3. *Complaints should always be welcomed.*—Generally speaking, complaints reveal the weak spots in business. They are therefore to be welcomed and given attention not only for the purpose of keeping customers satisfied, but as a highly valuable means of improving the product, the service and the sales distribution. The house which assumes the attitude that its goods and service are beyond criticism is shutting its eyes to symptoms of decay.

Robert R. Updegraff, the writer, says on this point:

> This idea ought to be sold to every correspondent who has anything to do with complaint correspondence. In my own experience I have had charge of a returned goods department in a mail-order business and I made it a practice of beginning every letter about returned goods with this sentence:
>
> "We are very glad indeed that you returned the ——," etc. Time after time, as I found out subsequently, the very fact that we started our letter that way disarmed the person and took away all the sting that there always is connected with returned goods. But quite as important was the fact that this expression soon gave the correspondents in the department a different attitude toward returned goods. They actually came to appreciate that letters of complaint and returned goods were desirable and that it was not at all desirable to have the customer keep the goods if he or she was not satisfied. In starting the letter with this sentence, the correspondent automatically put himself or herself in the right frame of mind to write the letter.

4. *Show sympathy and intent to remedy.*—Going

with an appreciation of the complainant's act should be an expression of sympathy for the disagreeable experience and something to show that the house intends to make good on anything that is wrong.

5. *Handling depends on circumstances.*—From this point on, the handling of the letter will depend on the circumstances. As we have seen, they come under several different classes. The customer, for example, may admittedly be right in his claim and yet no adjustment be made. For a business house to take such an attitude, tho it is not infrequently done, would seem to be utterly indefensible.

6. *Make concessions cheerfully.*—When the customer is right, or partly right and an adjustment is decided upon, it should be made promptly and in the best spirit. An adjustment grudgingly given might almost as well not have been made at all, a very important object of the adjustment being to retain the customer's good-will.

The adjustment letter in Chapter I illustrates one good way in which the matter may be handled, and the mail-order letter in Chapter II, another.

7. *Yielding when customer is wrong.*—But the customer sometimes is obviously wrong. Even then the house may consider it good policy to accept returned goods or make an adjustment, rather than dispute the claim. It would, of course, be altogether wrong to do this letting the customer assume that it believes he is right. Such a course would lead to continued imposition, as it did in many lines of trade

before the war, when the frequency of returns and of cancelations of orders was experienced by manufacturers as a great evil.

Some retailers maintain a policy that "the customer is always right," but they have the means at hand for determining his honesty. One large mail-order house finds it less expensive to satisfy all complaints without question than to audit them. While mail-order houses are very liberal in their attitude, they have nevertheless been obliged to keep and exchange blacklists of people who exploit their liberality, and in some cases to prosecute them.

This leaves two other possible policies, one being to adjust without delay, but in such a fashion that the customer will see the house's side. Such quick adjustments in dealing with the public are since the War becoming common again. Differences between commercial houses are more likely to be argued out.

8. *Handling the unreasonable customer.*—Interesting examples of both kinds of letters are given in the "Better Letter Course" which the Goodyear Rubber and Tire Company has prepared for the instruction of its correspondents. We may quote first from the problem of "The Unreasonable Customer":

A tire returned for adjustment came into a branch receiving room. The adjuster's inspection was as follows: Tread badly cut and loosened all around due to bad roads—fabric badly water-soaked beyond repair. Service at least 2500 miles.

It was a 34×4 Straight Side Smooth Tread.

The adjuster took the tag to his desk, looked to see if its owner had written about it, and found the following:

"I am sending you by prepaid express another of your very faulty tires.

"It has run only 700 miles on my light touring car and has had careful driving over pavement and excellent roads. This is about the same service I have been receiving from all your tires.

"The others on the car are in bad shape after practically no service at all and I expect you to make them all good according to your guarantee."

You are now to assume the rôle of adjuster and write a letter to the customer which will satisfy him but at a minimum of unjust loss to the company.

The company's policy on all complaints is

(1) To satisfy 100% of customers making complaints.
(2) To do so with the minimum of unjust loss to the company.

At first glance, this may appear to be a hard case to handle. The customer claims to have received a great deal less service from the tire than the inspection of the adjuster indicates. He claims to have given the tire much better care than its present condition shows. While he doesn't say so, he apparently thinks the tire was faulty in construction.

On misused tires no adjustment should theoretically be made. Clearly none is due. In actual practice, however, adjustments are frequently made. This is due to several reasons, chief among which is the fact that we, in common with other manufacturers, used to replace all tires submitted if they had not given 3500 miles of service, whether defective or not. This was not expressed in guarantees, but it was the prevailing custom.

As a result, dealers quoted 3500 miles as guarantees. Customers bought with that understanding. Of course all guarantees stated that abused tires were not subject to ad-

justment, but this provision was not generally observed.

A few years ago, the Goodyear guarantee was changed and a definite statement made that "Goodyear Pneumatic Automobile Tires are not guaranteed to give any definite miles of service."

Adjusters have tried to get dealers to make this clear to customers. Salesmen have done the same. But this is a policy that has to be "sold." The average customer has grown so used to mileage guarantees that he scoffs at one based only on a company's good faith. Hence dealers like to side-step the question. They prefer not to take the time to "sell" the new policy. So we have customers today who don't know that our guarantee doesn't specify definite miles of service.

The customer in this case is probably one of them. Would it be wise to send a copy of our guarantee and explain that as his tire is not defective no adjustment is due? It seems hardly necessary to say that such a suggestion should be dismissed at once. Regardless of whether he would be justified or not, he would undoubtedly consider that the tires were sold him under false representations.

Should we offer him an adjustment at all? This is a point we will not ask you to decide. It requires experience in dealing with complaints, which not everyone who follows the course has had. So we will suggest that a new tire be offered at $23.00. We don't believe that under the circumstances the customer's claim for adjustment can be completely rejected and his good-will retained.

The *Model Letter* is as follows:

To have a tire as badly mutilated as yours in 700 miles is about as annoying as to tear a good suit on a barbed wire fence the third day you wear it.

In fact, there are six snags right thru the tread of your tire. They have been there for some time. Ground and moisture entered them and loosened the tread. There is a lot of ground in there now.

You naturally want to get about ten times 700 miles out

of your tires. You can, too. Many Goodyear users do. There are tires right here in this office now that have gone several thousand miles and are in splendid condition compared with yours. Other tires here have gone 7000 to 10,000 miles.

Now suppose we work out somewhat of a "fifty-fifty" arrangement on this tire and see if all the rest of your tires treated as we will suggest, give excellent mileage.

The price of a 34×4 tire is $34.50. A mileage of 700 is worth a few dollars. So if you get a new tire for about $11.00 less than the regular price, the basis will be about "fifty-fifty." We are willing to do that, say $23.00 even.

Now about your other tires. You say "Goodyear tires have certainly been standing up in very poor shape on my machine." Have you really had to discard Goodyear tires after short mileage, or do you mean that the rest of the tires on your car now look as if they will not last long?

Tell us all about it, please. You are entitled to all we can do toward longer mileage.

The Central Garage and Mill's Motor Sales Company of your city are Goodyear Service Stations. In addition to writing us, will you go to one of these service Stations, so they can look at your tires and tell you of their service? Maybe the rest of your tires have cuts thru the thread that should be sealed. Let a Goodyear Service Station look after it for you.

In view of your experience, you will find the enclosed booklet interesting.

We will be looking forward to your next letter. Sorry you are not here so we could talk about it and give you quicker service.

9. *Educating the contentious dealer.*—The second Goodyear problem, that of "The Contentious Garageman," covers a case where the house, while willing to suffer a loss for policy's sake, avoided it and secured a settlement thru a letter of tactful explanation:

A small garageman during the month of June bought tires and tubes amounting to $298.40 subject as usual to 5 per cent discount if paid before July 10. During June, however, he returned unsalable tires amounting to $114.20. His remittance was received before July 10, but in figuring it he made an error. His check amounted to $169.28. It should have been $174.99. He figured as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Total charges. . . . . | $298.40 |
| Deduct 5% for cash . . . | 14.92 |
| | $283.48 |
| Deduct goods returned . . | 114.20 |
| Check inclosed for. . . . | $169.28 |

The $114.20 returned goods were included in the $298.40 and were subject to 5 per cent cash discount if he had kept them. But if he wanted to deduct 5 per cent of the $298.40 item then he should have also deducted 5 per cent from the $114.20 item. Or a more simple way to figure would have been as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Total charges. . . . . | $298.40 |
| Deduct goods returned . . | 114.20 |
| Net Purchases. . . . . | $184.20 |
| Deduct 5% for cash . . . | 9.21 |
| Correct amount to remit. . | $174.99 |

The oversight was pointed out to the garageman, but the error in figuring was not explained and the garageman took issue with the house. The model letter that follows was then sent, and brought in the $5.71 immediately with a letter from the garageman saying he was "sorry to ball things up so."

You are right when you say that our invoice of $298.40 was subject to 5 per cent discount for cash if paid by July 10. Furthermore we are not going to ask you to send in the disputed $5.71 if you don't owe it. But let's go over your last month's business again so as to get everything straight and clear.

First we shipped you $298.40 worth of goods subject to 5 per cent cash discount. As you say, $283.48 pays for it.

But you returned $114.20 worth. You kept only $184.20 worth. When you pay for them, you deduct 5 per cent discount, which is $9.21 and send us $174.99. If you deduct 5 per cent of the full $298.40, then also deduct 5 per cent from $114.20 before you subtract it, the result is the same—$174.99. Otherwise it amounts to your buying tires at a 5 per cent discount, but returning them at full price.

We want you to be satisfied about this, tho, and if everything isn't perfectly clear to you, don't send the additional $5.71. Give us an opportunity to make this absolutely clear.

These letters about tires might be supplemented by letters taken from other fields, but they would not necessarily add anything to the discussion. It does not make any difference whether we talk about tires or hairpins; the circumstances may be different, but the principles are the same.

10. *When satisfaction is refused.*—When the customer is wrong and the house decides that an adjustment is not warranted, the grounds for the decision, which cannot have been taken without long thought and regret, should be carefully explained to the customer and his sense of justice enlisted even if not directly appealed to.

The following paragraphs open a letter from an

automobile truck manufacturer to another manufacturer, his customer, who had tried in vain to convince him that it was good business to keep the latter's fleet of trucks in repair, for the sake of the resulting goodwill.

You have certainly made out a fine case for free service. Every word is true. I wish it were equally convincing. You see there has been a condition in the industry such as you can hardly appreciate. We have all burnt our fingers on free service, and, to tell the truth, we are frightened to death of it. Possibly we are wrong. Possibly other lines —your own, for instance—are giving a free service like ours and find it pays.

If there is a happy solution anywhere, one that pleases both sides, you can be sure I wish to know it. I believe that after you have heard our experience you will tell us where we can find such a solution, or else you'll agree we did the only thing we could do. I don't care which course you take; either way, we shall have your help.

The refusal is not absolute. Instead the question is put up to the other man for solution. If he is fair he will come around to the writer's side. If he is unreasonable, there is no better way of convincing him.

11. *First and last, keep your temper.*—Of all types of letters none puts such a strain on the writer's composure as the complaint. It must not be forgotten, however, that everything that has been said with regard to courtesy and friendliness applies here with redoubled force. Under no conditions does the expert correspondent lose his temper or permit any sign of resentment to creep into his reply, no matter

how wrongheaded and exasperating the complainant may be. There are departments and correspondents that exult over the arrival of a particularly vicious note that gives them a chance to exercise their talents as peacemakers.

At the same time it is very easy to exaggerate the attitude and meet ill temper with such a parade of refinement that the original feeling of the aggrieved customer is intensified. True courtesy would ignore the petulance or abuse and cheerfully give the complainant the information and adjustment that are required with whatever sympathy the case really calls for.

12. *Anxiety leads to overdoing courtesy.*—A common mistake of inexperienced adjustment correspondents is to show anxiety in their replies. They are too obviously courteous. The rule, we should recall, is to please the reader. What pleases the reader, however, is not elaborately turned sentences, but the satisfaction of his demand, or an explanation in regard to it.

13. *Pointers for correspondents.*—The right attitude to take is further illustrated by a list of "Inside Tips on Adjustment Letters" prepared by a mail-order house:

Welcome every complaint
Sympathize with the complainant
Show willingness to make right any wrong
Avoid promises unless you are sure you can keep them
Get at the facts of the case
Avoid arguments—state facts

Be courteous, but not effusive

Cheer up all the time

Avoid weak-sounding apologies—admit derogatory facts frankly

Make good with deeds rather than with words

Have a good reason for each concession

Never suggest that you suspect the customer of dishonesty or carelessness

Give the customer the benefit of any doubt

Don't cause the customer inconvenience, especially for anything that is our fault

Satisfy the customer, if possible; but be just as fair to the house as to the customer. That's the only kind of fairness that is fair.

14. *Principles apply to traffic letters, as well.*—It need hardly be said that what applies to the relation of house and customer also applies to that of shipper and railroad or express company. Courtesy should be carried into every situation, not because there is an immediate dollar to be saved or made, but because it smoothes the way for all business and promotes better service.

## REVIEW

How can adjustment letters be made "constructive" in effect?

In what respect should they resemble sales letters?

How would you answer an unjustifiable, abusive complaint, and refuse adjustment?

What possible "service" could you perform in a letter to such a complainant?

Is it as important to get the other man's point of view in this case as it would be, for instance, in the case of sales and collection letters?

What is the object of adjustment letters?

Do the complainants always want what they ask for, or is there another standard to apply?

# CHAPTER XIII

## CREDIT LETTERS

1. *Assuming a constructive rôle.*—The underlying principles of credit and collection were explained in the Text volume on the subject. The two functions, it was pointed out, complement each other, but, as is often said, "good credits are half of collections." This, however, leaves to collection too negative a rôle. It, too, has come under the spell of new ideas and like other parts of business has given its own methods a "constructive" twist. There is no less a determination to "get the money" than before, but there is a good deal more of an effort to stand with and back of the customer and prevent conditions from getting to such a pass that heroic collection measures become necessary.

2. *Main purposes of credit letters.*—Credit letters have these chief functions:

Getting information from the customer and others about his business as a basis for credit.

Granting credit with reasonable freedom to help sales.

Refusing credit when absolutely necessary.

Keeping the rejected applicant for credit as a cash customer and helping him to build up his credit.

Helping all customers to improve their credit

standing, including their business methods in general.

3. *Credit and sales work together.*—Credits are closely related to sales. The credit and sales departments work in conjunction.

A good credit letter, as may be supposed, is even harder to write than a good sales letter. Since there is no subject on which the customer is so sensitive as that of his credit standing, he must be handled with the utmost tact. Actually, the process is one of selling credit and, as in all other cases, the sales formula applies.

4. *Selling principles apply.*—All of the principles discussed in our early chapters come into action. Every good credit letter is written from the point of view of the reader, as well as that of the house; the good credit man considers the interests of both. It is not always to the interest of a customer to do what he wishes. He may mistake his circumstances. To refuse a man credit will be the best service you can render him if it prevents him from getting more hopelessly into debt.

The principles of the "Seven C's" apply. No letter should be more Concrete than the credit manager's. Many men keep files of every sort of personal information they can gather about their customers from salesmen, trade journals and local papers. This is because credit rating by a commercial agency is only a rough index to the customer's ability to succeed or pay. The experienced credit manager endeavors to get the whole story.

The need for Candor is even more express. It is complimentary to assume that the customer has no reason to conceal his credit standing, and therefore to ask him straightforwardly for any information you require. The successful business man will resent a credit letter that beats about the bush. Then, too, the direct letter "smokes out" the poor risk, who betrays himself by silence, excuses or anger.

The credit manager is open and direct because he wishes to set an example to the customer. Credit dealings are established on a high plane at the start in order that the collection dealings may continue so. When it becomes necessary for the house in applying pressure to take a strong moral stand, it will help to have a record that supports it. Where there is weakness at the start, every subsequent slip is made harder.

The need for Courtesy, Clearness, Completeness, Conciseness and Correctness may be similarly justified.

Then, too, the logical formula applies. Credit and collection letters are perhaps even more severely logical than most other letters. This is necessary and desirable if it does not mean curtness and coldness, as too often, however, it does. It is the nature of most business men to want more credit than they ought to have. On these men the credit man's logic falls like a cold shower. It needs a smart rubdown afterwards to bring the glow of confidence and gratitude. Without that feeling on the part of the creditor, the credit man's job would be a thankless and in

the end unprofitable one. His logic must be humanized.

The psychological formula of Picture—Promise—Prove—Push is likewise practical, tho not so much called upon as it might be.

5. *Credit practice increasingly liberal.*—The credit attitude of commercial houses has grown increasingly liberal over the past few decades. This is partly on account of the growth of sales competition. In a way, sales are regulated by credit conditions. The percentage of credit loss spells the price we pay for business. The price may be too high. On the other hand, the loss may be too small, and clearly indicate that the house is overcautious and even ungenerous in the attitude it assumes towards its customers.

Other reasons for greater liberality in credit accommodation than formerly are the improved collection facilities, better collection methods, the progressive education of trade and public in credit principles, and the gradual appreciation of the fact that at heart most people are honest, as shown by the experience of the mail-order houses.

6. *Prestige affects credit correspondence.*—It is evident that the correspondence policy of a house in the matter of both credits and collections will be influenced greatly by its standing and reputation. If these are high, customers will seek it and it will be easier for it to maintain a stiff credit policy. If it has no such prestige, it must be either more accom-

modating in its extension of credit, or else much more energetic in its sales, credit and collection efforts.

7. *Meeting requests for credit.*—Credit letters fall under several different heads. The first contact with the customer may be his letter asking for an extension of credit on the house salesman's recommendation. Then may follow a request from the house for information as to the customer's business, the extent of his capital, his assets and liabilities, sales and income. The detail of this has been given in the volume on "Credits and Collections." The following letter from a manufacturer to a retail dealer illustrates such a letter in tone, manner and matter:

We are in receipt of your good order, as reported by Mr. Gates, and are preparing to ship September 1, according to instructions.

Mr. Gates' report shows that you have taken over the former store of Dawes & Henley and have incorporated for $10,000. It does not show, however, how much of this is paid in and available for capital, or whether you are assuming the liabilities of the former concern, and if so, how much they amount to. We would be glad to have you let us know in regard to this matter, in order that we may be fully informed.

Mr. Gates no doubt explained our terms on an initial order, namely, one-half cash in advance of shipment when information is furnished to make credit for the balance of the order. We shall therefore be glad to have your check for $275 at your convenience. Of course, on this amount we will allow an extra 1 per cent in lieu of terms and dating.

We shall appreciate an early reply, and wish you the fullest success in your new enterprise.

The letter is thoroly businesslike, and yet courteous. No one could take exception to it except a dealer who wished to avoid complying with the terms. The dealer in this case seemed to show an inclination to avoid them, and it was necessary to retain him if possible as a cash customer.

8. *Asking for credit information.*—When the credit manager writes to a reference furnished by an applicant for credit, he may do so somewhat like this:

Oscar B. Blank Co.
Xenia, Ohio
Initial Order

Recently we received a first order from this company. They wish to purchase from us on a credit basis and have given your name as a reference.

Any information you may see fit to give us concerning their credit standing and ability to meet their obligations promptly will surely be appreciated and used in strict confidence. A stamped self-addressed envelop is inclosed for your convenience.

If at another time we can be of similar service to you please do not hesitate to ask for information.

Many business men are members of credit associations and exchange credit information among themselves. In such cases regular forms are provided for requests and reports.

9. *When a customer asks too much.*—A dealer may believe that his business condition is better than a credit manager will concede. The following letter shows how a case of this kind may be handled without giving offense and losing a good customer.

Your good order of September 3 is very much appreciated. We also thank you for the financial statement inclosed.

After going carefully over the information you furnish, we are glad to extend immediately credit to the amount of $300.00. This is by no means a definite limit, but can be changed as soon as our business relations warrant.

Since your order is somewhat in excess of this amount, we suggest any one of the following ways of handling the case.

You can make a partial advance which would entitle you to the regular 2 per cent cash discount.

Or, if you furnish us the names of three or four firms from whom you have been buying on open account, we can doubtless arrange to take care of the entire order.

Should you be in immediate need of the goods, we can make shipment of some of every number ordered. This would enable you to supply your trade while arrangements for the remainder of the order are being completed.

In any case, we want to help you. Goodrich advertising has created a big demand for Goodrich products. Hence, it is our aim to make it possible for you to "cash in" on this demand and thus increase your profits.

The inclosed stamped envelop is for your convenience in telling us which of the above plans meets with your approval.

Two or three points may be selected for comment. First, only partial credit is given, but instead of the fact being stated negatively, it is put positively, "We are glad to extend, immediately, credit to the amount of $300.00," and "This is by no means a definite limit." Again, the handling of the matter, while courteous and considerate, is entirely dignified and therefore devoid of anxiety. Lastly, the writer takes the opportunity in the very first letter to begin the "resale" process, which not only assures the reader

of the house's interest in him, but refreshes his mind as to his main motive for buying.

10. *Good credit letters are educational.*—Nearly all good credit letters are educational, in the sense of reselling the customer either on the value of the business connection, or else on the importance of good credit. This is done by the frequent repetition of certain important ideas and suggestions, as may be seen in the preceding letters. The same course is followed in regard to collection letters.

## REVIEW

Describe the relation of credit letters to collections and to sales.

How can a credit letter be a selling letter?

How would you apply the logical formula to a credit letter? What would the argument be?

How would you apply the "Picture—Promise—Prove—Push" formula?

If any credit letters are available to you, test them by the several formulas.

Study the Goodrich letter in this chapter and explain why the tone, while "courteous," is entirely impersonal and free from anxiety. What makes it so?

# CHAPTER XIV

## COLLECTION LETTERS

1. *Collection letters also are constructive.*—Collection not only dovetails with the credit function and with sales, but closely touches complaints and adjustments. Poor goods and neglect to "make good" on complaints are frequent reasons, real or alleged, for refusals to pay and delays in doing so. On this account the same correspondents often handle both adjustments and collections.

Broadly speaking, the collection letter has two purposes. The first is to "get the money." The other is to "keep the customer." In both cases the customer must be persuaded; so far as possible, the original state of satisfaction under which he bought must be restored.

Hence, like every other letter, the collection letter is a selling letter, and all the principles described in the early chapters as being involved in the art of persuasive letter writing apply to it. No matter how insistent the collection manager may be for payment, the letter he sends is always written around the customer's interests. It is always in the latter's real interest to pay. To use every effort and every legitimate device to make him pay, and to do it all, even

to taking him to court, without anger and bitterness —perhaps afterward to win him back as a customer —are the tasks of the collection department.

2. *Reasons why men pay.*—Collections, while closely related to sales and other letters, thus have a psychology of their own. The general reasons why business men pay have been thus listed:

Business habit, system
Good-will, friendliness
Integrity, fairness
Pride, self-respect, honor
Desire for good reputation and its advantages
Desire for discount
Desire for business efficiency and success
Desire to avoid annoyance, fear.

For those outside of business, the basic appeals have been stated as follows: Appeals to good-will, to pride, to justice and fair play, and to fear.

All the springs of human strength and weakness must, in fact, be known to the collection correspondent who would make his letters productive. There are times, as recently, when a man owes it to his country to pay promptly, and then the patriotic motive may be stressed. At another time, with due reason, the love of home, family pride and desire to preserve it untarnished may be made the basis of approach.

3. *Collection customs and conditions differ.*—It is obvious that these motives will have a different order of importance with different people. Some respond most quickly to one appeal, some to another.

There are wide variations in the paying and collection customs of different lines of trade. Men who have not had the discipline of business are more lax in paying than those who have had it. Women in general find it easier to buy than to pay.

Hence in one line, where credit and collection education has brought about a high standard of practice, the collection letters will be brief and few in follow-up, and the climax of settlement or legal steps will be soon reached, while in another line custom may let the process drag thru a dozen or twenty letters. On account of different conditions, retail collection methods are ordinarily more lenient in the early stages than wholesale methods. Manufacturers cannot, for reasons just explained, handle other manufacturers in the same way that general distributors would handle their retail trade. Mail-order houses, correspondence schools and instalment houses may have a long series of letters and several variations of each of them.

No one rule can therefore be given that will apply to all cases. All we can do is to learn the general principles and select such of them as seem to fit the needs of the business and customs of our line.

4. *Payment both obligation and advantage.*—To business houses and individuals, settlement wears a double face. It is, first of all, an obligation. But as prompt payment secures discounts and improves credit standing, it must also be regarded from the standpoint of advantage.

Experience shows that most people, debtors in-

cluded, are honest. Their delinquencies are of the intelligence and will, and not of the heart. When they begin to slip behind, we shall generally find that something has gone wrong with their business judgment or ability: either they have shouldered too heavy responsibilities, or else they have neglected to keep abreast of the times in business information. Their minds have been too exclusively fixed on sales or buying or production and they have temporarily forgotten the great advantages that come from prompt settlement, and the equally great disadvantages that follow delay.

Normally, then, in the early stages of delinquency, the debtor is most likely to be brought back to the straight path by reminders of these advantages and disadvantages. Many houses do not reach this stage until several letters have failed to secure favorable action, but collection managers operating in some of the most difficult fields believe that it pays to introduce the educational thought at the earliest possible moment.

5. *When debtor continues delinquent.*—When, however, the delinquent does not respond to these educational reminders and neither explains the reasons for delay nor gives the creditor an opportunity to take counsel with him as to their possible removal, the creditor's attitude undergoes a change. The debtor has been deaf to the appeal of advantage. It is time he shall see the matter as an obligation, which may not be avoided. He must be shamed into it.

6. *Threaten, with regret.*—Supposing, however, he is still obstinate or stupid, or possibly dishonest, the situation enters a third stage of fear and threat. There is still no anger on the part of the collection manager. He may, if anything, be even more friendly and solicitous. Regret that it should be necessary to do what must hurt is the tone taken up to the last minute.

7. *Appeal to best in debtor.*—It will be seen that the sole hope of securing a settlement on any other basis than fear is an appeal to practical motives and the higher sentiments. Obviously, if we expect payment, it will not do to break down the delinquent's morale. He must be encouraged. His fading sense of advantage and obligation must be restored by vivid, positive, friendly affirmations and suggestions. He must be brought back to self-respect and confidence.

Consequently, the greatest pains should be taken at every stage of the collection process to avoid saying or doing anything that will confirm a delinquent in the bad habits of procrastination, stubbornness and discouragement. It will be necessary to avoid all expressions and suggestions of impatience, anger, pity or contempt in our letters, because these, in turn, arouse anger, self-pity or self-contempt in the mind of the debtor, and, destroying the picture of self-reliance and integrity we are endeavoring to build up there, make our task of restoration all the harder.

8. *Wearing down the delinquent.*—This princi-

ple, that the collection process should be thruout an educational one, does not at all conflict with another fundamental, that success in collection is due to persistency and repetition. It is a persuasion among many collection managers that after a certain point "it does not make much difference what you say in the letter;" the debtor, they point out, may not read the letters, may not even open them; he is worn down by the persistent annoyance and the growing fear of loss of credit and legal action.

9. *Persistency plus education.*—It is true that education is a slow process and that the words of the collection correspondent may not have the result ostensibly sought. Nevertheless, the educational letter sets a standard, and a high one. It leaves the debtor without any basis for criticising the house as to manner. It constantly forces a comparison in his mind between his own conduct and that of the creditor. If he is not dishonest, these things have weight. He may actually have forgotten the debt, or believe he has paid it. This is often the case, because many business men are slack in their accounts. If he has believed this, the repeated affirmations of the creditor house as to the existence of the obligation and the evidence of its insistent but friendly attitude will go far to change his mind, and every successive letter, whether he reads it or not, will weigh heavily upon him.

If the reverse were true, if the correspondent had yielded to a misguided impulse to put a sting in the

early letters, the debtor's feeling would be quite different. He would be antagonistic, and while the immediate end might be the same in both cases, in the second the debtor would be an active and unrelenting critic, who could probably never again be restored to the list of customers, and might in one way or another do the creditor a good deal of harm.

10. *Collection letters follow an order.*—Collection letters always go thru their series in a certain order, as follows:

Notification
Reminder
Reproach
Discussion
Urgency
Ultimatum.

The terms are self-explanatory. Notification takes place at the time of the shipment of the goods. All of the other steps admit of much variation, and often require it. When, for example, customers are repeatedly delinquent, the series of letters must be different for each time, since otherwise the delinquent would settle back and wait for the familiar series to have its run.

11. *Trying to surprise a good impulse.*—Because all appeals of the same kind lose their force in time, the character of the letters is often varied and novel matter or suggestions are introduced with the inten-

tion of surprising the debtor into a fresh or stronger sense of his responsibility, and leading him to settle on impulse.

12. *Most collection letters are reminders.*—By far the larger number of collection letters come under the head of reminders. In the first stage of delinquency, the creditor may assume that the debtor is merely slow or forgetful, and therefore the first reminder will be courteously phrased. If several reminders are sent, the writer will gradually lay aside deference for crisp seriousness. Naturally, practice differs widely. Some houses make a virtue of extreme brevity, as in the following examples:

PAYMENT OF ACCOUNT

Doubtless you have overlooked our invoice of July 5 which amounts to $22.15. On our net 60 days basis this became due September 3.

If you find our invoice to be correct an early payment will be appreciated.

When no check has been sent after ten days, this letter follows:

PAYMENT OF ACCOUNT

On September 10 we wrote you concerning your overdue account of July 5 amounting to $22.15.

Possibly you have some reason for withholding payment, in which case we would be very glad to have you write us about it. Otherwise we shall expect immediate payment of the invoice.

This letter almost reaches the stage of urgency.

It is still agreeable, tho deference has been dropped. Notice that the writer makes no excuse for reminding the customer of his overdue obligation. The responsibility is put where it belongs.

It will be noticed that the two letters make no formal appeal to good-will, pride, justice or fair play. Can we therefore say there is no appeal there? On the contrary, the very restraint of the letters is eloquent in its suggestion of the right and honorable course for the debtor to pursue. The brevity is not curtness, but courtesy.

An interesting development of collection methods has taken place with reference to this stage of reminder. This is the use of printed stickers to paste on the collection letters to make them less formal. The stickers are gotten up in books or sets. Some are in the form of pictures full of suggestive quality, as a hand dropping a letter in a mail box, the legend reading "Kindly mail the amount of this bill today." The results of such use are said to be generally excellent.

13. *One kind of collection letter.*—Here is a letter sent out by a retail house which is typical of a very large number of retail collection letters:

The bookkeeper has handed me the inclosed statement covering purchases made by you during April to the amount of $3.50.

As our terms are thirty days, this amount is now considerably past due. We presume that it has been thru an oversight that this has not been taken care of. Our business necessitates a great number of small accounts which in

the aggregate amount to quite a sum. By remitting at once it will save us considerable work and expense in sending statements.

Your favor will be appreciated.

The first line attempts a kind of impressiveness that no longer impresses. The only thought the writer conveys is that the bookkeeper was a month behind in his duty. The somewhat apologetic explanation about the large number of small accounts is unnecessary and deepens the feeling that the writer is anxious not to give offense. Suppose these two faults of indirectness and anxiety were corrected and without other marked change the letter were made to read:

The April purchases of $3.50 with which you favored us were due for payment June 1. No doubt you had forgotten it. Our account will be off your mind if you send a check—in the inclosed envelop—today.

Would not this be better than the previous letter? There is reminder, courteous restraint, unexpressed appeal to good-will, pride and justice and a helpful suggestion about using the envelop which is also, from the writer's point of view, a good incentive to action.

14. *Collection letter with a "stunt".*—The following retail collection letter was sent out by a tailor:

When you were a boy your mother probably did as mine did—tied a string around my finger so that I would remember errands long enough to fulfill them.

Sometimes this works well with grown ups, so we are sending a little string herewith.

Won't you wrap it around your finger, at the same time saying to yourself, "I am going to send Hanson a check for $10.00, which has been due him for quite a little while"?

This is what is called in advertising a "stunt." A "stunt" may produce very well, but it generally makes succeeding collections harder; the house must live up to its reputation for cleverness, and that gets more and more difficult. The tendency of business is away from all sorts of freak correspondence and in the direction of clearer, simpler letters, including those that educate. The higher the standard of business ethics, the simpler need the letters be, and, conversely, the simpler, more direct, more sincere the letters, the higher the standards will rise.

15. *Capitalizing on frankness.*—The following letter, tho of an unusual nature, is not a "stunt":

There is past due on your account $102.34. This covers items of March 31.

There is no use camouflaging the fact that the purpose of this reminder is

(*a*) to get the money
(*b*) to ascertain the cause of the delay, or
(*c*) to uncover any differences that may exist between your books and ours.

And the greatest of these is (*a*).

This letter has been successfully used by some of the best houses in the country. It is courteous, good-humored, comes directly to the point and "puts it up" to the delinquent.

16. *Keeping the customer in the picture.*—The

following letter was written by a large house in the steel line:

Why do good collections win business? Because a man who keeps an account paid up feels a certain satisfaction in dealing with that concern. He feels that he is a privileged person, always welcome. If he lets the account lag, there is an irresistible temptation to go elsewhere for his supplies until the bill is paid.

'It's not only because we need the money that we ask you to send us a check to-day. It is because we want all your business, and we want to quiet the little voice of conscience which might suggest that you place some of it elsewhere. We want you to feel the privileged customer you really are; and reward the low prices, the prompt shipments, and the superior value you have been getting from us with prompt payments.

That's why you are going to take the inclosed brown envelop to your bookkeeper now, and say,

"Send a check to Hogan today."

This writer kept the customer all the time in the picture. It appealed to good-will, pride, fair play, advantage and sense of obligation. The letter is educational. It is imaginative. And it is natural. It is just the sort of letter which the executive receiving it would read aloud to his associates in the office and commend to his own collection department, after dictating a memorandum to the bookkeeper to "send a check to Hogan today."

17. *When the amount is trifling.*—When the amount owing is small, it is worth while putting some thought into the collection letter in order to make sure

that we shall not have to repeat. Here is a *Printers' Ink* collection letter that was very successful:

What do you do when a man owes you a small sum of money—$3.00 for instance—and doesn't respond to bills and statements?

Do you just charge it off to profit and loss, or do you spend another $3.00 sending him letters and more bills?

The reason we are asking you is that you have sent us an order for *Printers' Ink* and have postponed paying for it. Our first bill was rendered on ——.

We know you're "good for it," but won't you kindly attach your check or money order for $3.00 to this letter and send it back by return mail? Then you'll feel better and so will we.

18. *Collecting a mail-order.*—In the following case the delinquents knew neither the publisher nor the advertising agent who wrote the letter. The amount involved was $2.00 only, and this was the gross return, out of which all costs and profits had to come. These are two reasons why the letter is long and forceful.

*To Those Who Want to Help People Save:*

Last December I was much impressed by the campaign for increased thrift in the United States. The various drives, including Liberty Loan, Red Cross, and War Savings Stamps, brought this strongly to my attention.

I became interested in a book known as Woolson's Economy Expense Book. It occurred to me that, regardless of whether or not money could be made by selling it, that it was a good thing to promote just at this time. Accordingly, I backed the publishers of this book for many thousands of dollars, in order that they might run the big campaign

which they ran in December, January, February and March.

The publishers did not make any money on this campaign. They will break even, provided they can collect their bills.

You are one of those who owe George B. Woolson & Company $2.00 for a copy of this book. It was sent to you on approval, with the understanding you would return it within five days or that you would pay for it. Now two dollars is not very much money; but because they sold 50,000 copies of this book, you can readily understand that the book accounts, or money outstanding, amount to a great deal.

I am sending you this personal letter, asking you if you will please pay George B. Woolson & Company the amount that you owe. These are not easy times for anybody to do business; but if every man does his part and meets his obligations promptly we all can undoubtedly steer the business of the country to safety.

Right now, and within the next few days, George B. Woolson & Company need a lot of money to meet their obligations. Will you please send the $2.00 to them? Do not send the money to me, but mail it, please, to them, addressing George B. Woolson & Company, 116 West 32nd Street, New York City. By so doing you will be helping a firm which is trying to do its bit in winning the War by promoting thrift.

At first sight this is not a "you" letter. The writer starts out talking about himself and then the publisher. He even says that the publishers need the money. But we only notice this on analyzing the letter. The initial effect is quite different. We are interested by the narrative style, by the reference to thrift, by the fact that the writer thought so much of the Economy Expense Book that he backed it, "regardless whether or not money could be made by selling it," and by the fact that actually 50,000 copies

were sold on credit. When he asks us to send the $2.00 we owe, not to himself, but to the publishers, we overlook the fact that he doubtless expects to get his own money back; we only see what seems almost an altruistic appeal to help the publisher. And he is not at all anxious; he has every confidence in the reader.

19. *Stage of heart-to-heart talk.*—If the customer is still recalcitrant, we pass out of the stage of reminder and enter that of discussion. The effort now is to find out "what the trouble is" and to explain in some detail the house's feelings and attitude, in order, if it should be necessary to proceed to more urgent measures, that he should not feel that he has been treated unfairly. The last three letters quoted have some of the characteristics of "discussion" letters. An attempt is usually made, as there, to get close to the customer and talk it over with him, man to man, in order to reach an understanding that will obviate any unpleasantness.

It is at this stage, if at all, that the salesman's good-will with the customer may be used. He is the only one of the organization that has come into direct contact with the customer and he must be presumed to have some influence with him. It is not ordinarily a good plan to let the salesman mix sales and collections. The proposal in this case is merely for the salesman to sign a letter that has been written in the office and that is more intimate than any one there could logically sign.

20. *Before the trap falls.*—Sometimes the creditor proceeds at once without discussion from reminder to urgency. The debtor is notified, still with courtesy, that unless a remittance is received within, say, ten days, a draft will be presented to him thru one of the local banks; or he may be asked whether he will make a settlement direct, or honor a draft. Unless his check is received, the house will take it for granted that it has his permission to draw.

If the draft is not accepted, further correspondence may lead up to the account being placed in the hands of an attorney or a collection agency. The agency may be conducted by the creditor house itself. Before this is done further efforts to collect may be made by registered letter, by telegraph or by telephone, when this is feasible.

A variation that many times proves effective is to have the letter written by a man higher up in the organization. This is called an "advance in authority." The debtor, even when he knows he is in the wrong, may stubbornly refuse to have anything further to say to the collection manager, and yet prove thoroly reasonable when addressed in a friendly way by the general manager or secretary of the company. This gives him the opportunity he perhaps really wishes to "save his face" and settle, while at the same time expressing his private opinion of the collection department head.

In following up a delinquent, we shall find it advisable to make allowances for distance, and time our

letters with reference to the zone system of mailings. If demand is made for payment in New York or Chicago on a certain day, we must be sure that a margin of time is given for the letter to reach the delinquent and permit him to make any necessary arrangements and get his letter back in season. Otherwise the only result is a further sense of irritation or injustice on the part of the debtor, more excuses and more delay.

21. *Differentiating the form letter.*—Collection letters are usually form letters, carefully prepared in series, and so far as possible, accommodated to different classes. The same kind of a letter, that is to say, would not be sent to a big house that is sent to a small one, or to a farmer that is sent to a city man, or to a woman that is sent to a man. While a few years ago there was felt to be no great objection to a debtor knowing that the letter sent him was a form letter, the tendency now is to make it as personal and individual as possible.

The length of the series depends on conditions, trade customs and the like. Ten or twelve letters will usually cover all ordinary needs, being sent at intervals of ten days or two weeks. Mail-order, instalment collection and correspondence houses often, as said, use twice as many.

A word of warning should be directed against the temptation to let a good collection system run itself. There is no danger in working it up to a high state of mechanical efficiency so long as there is a directing

mind to take note of exceptional instances and vary the procedure on occasion. All authorities agree as to the waste of effort attending a too automatic plan.

## REVIEW

What are the objects of a collection letter?

How can you reconcile the requirements of courtesy in effective collection letters with the need for persistency, which is often unwelcome to the person receiving them?

Has the field of collections peculiar conditions and difficulties that make it impossible to apply the correspondence principles and formulas that have been discussed?

How far is the delinquent's point of view to be learned and considered?

To what extent is a collection letter a selling letter?

What other important reasons can you think of other than those given why a collection system should not be left to run itself? Would the unguided form letters be uniformly concrete, courteous, clear, etc.?

# CHAPTER XV

## WORKING THE MAILING LIST

1. *First letter rakes for "leads."*—In most mail campaigns it takes more than one letter to make a sale. Ordinarily what results from a first letter is a request for more information. Of the more responsive "prospects," a part are "closed" by a second letter and some of those remaining by a third, fourth and perhaps other mailings. There is a natural tendency on the part of the readers to put off decision, and business houses to a certain extent defer to the tendency. Instead of striving hard to "close sales" in one letter, they generally bait the first letter with something that may arouse curiosity and lead to inquiry.

The principle involved is obvious. It is much easier to get people interested and to ask for further information than it is to get them to buy, and it is much easier to sell self-indicated prospective buyers than it is to sell those who have declared no interest. The line of least resistance, then, for direct advertising campaigns is to rake large mailing lists of possibilities for *probable "prospects"* and concentrate the heavy sales fire on these. Both kinds of attack are usually accomplished thru so-called "form" letters.

Whether the raking letter is sent by manufacturers to other manufacturers, or by wholesale distributors to retailers, or to consumers, whether for the purpose of selling outright, or of securing names of prospects to turn over to dealers or agents, or of paving the way for the visits of the house salesman, this object will naturally qualify the expression of the letter; but the principle involved in all cases is the same.

2. *Selective quality of the form letter.*—Business houses are not agreed, however, in their estimates of the ability of the form letter to produce sales leads of a high quality in comparison with that of personally dictated and individually typed letters. Most form letters are duplicated or "processed," with the names and addresses "filled in" afterward, tho there are duplicating machines that automatically type each letter. And most form letters are less personal and direct than the best kind of personal letters written to customers whose names, characteristics and circumstances the writer knows.

In the nature of things, the writer of a letter or series of letters going out to a large general list or to a number of lists of names cannot have very specific knowledge. So far as he can, he makes his letters personal. There is nothing that the writer of a "personally dictated" letter puts into it, under corresponding conditions, that cannot go into a form letter. It is safe to say that most form letters have vastly more thought lavished on them than most "personal" letters.

On the surface, the critics of the form letter admit the advantage is in its favor. The question, being one not of percentage of returns alone, but of greatest returns at least cost, is settled by an appeal to experience. The individually typed letter cannot reach the thousands that the duplicated letter can, and what is lost in the former's sort of individuality is more than made by the large volume of "leads" and business resulting. It is in handling the inquiries and taking advantage of the knowledge of distinctions of character and detail that the personal handling excels, and many houses that use form letters to open up their market turn to personal handling to make the most of the "leads" secured.

Even here the form letter need make no concession. The follow-up, as we shall see, can be individualized and personalized to a much greater extent than the first inquiry-seeking letter going out of necessity into the unknown.

Apparently what the critics of the form letter condemn is a poor form letter, one without personality and power, poorly reproduced, with bad matching of colors, flagrantly misrepresenting itself as an individually dictated letter, and uttering generalities. Certainly, nobody will have a good word for such a letter, for it is worthless. There is no reason why the duplicating or the processing should be poor, why name and address should not match the body of the letter both in color and alignment; nowadays that is merely a matter of care. Again, form letters, as we

saw, are being written with much more thought than formerly. Most significantly, too, there is a growing tendency to get away from "personally dictated" misrepresentation, and make the form letter what in fact it should be, an out and out advertising letter, filling the place between the printed advertising matter and the letter that is really personal and doing what neither of the others can so well do. The character of this advertising letter will be described in a later paragraph.

3. *How prospects are sifted out.*—It was said that the purpose of the first letter of a series is to turn up inquiries. We may take a glance at the method of doing so and its three or four steps. The first step, that of securing or preparing the mailing lists of names, we need not go into here inasmuch as it has been treated in the volume on "Advertising Campaigns." Its object is to get a list of possibilities.

A business house handles this list of possibilities in one of two ways, according to its nature. If the "prospects" are all of about the same class or kind, or if the list cannot be classified in any satisfactory way, then naturally one letter will do as well as twenty, and the house sends out one. But if, on the other hand, the house finds that it can classify the list, say, by men and women, by business and professional men, by executives and employes, by houses in different lines of trade, or on some similar basis of differentiation, then it has six or a dozen or twenty smaller unified lists, and it sends to the names on each

of them a letter that is different from that going to any of the other lists, a letter that on that very account is so much more individual, personal, *concrete.*

4. *Classifying lists closely.*—The tendency is to carry this process of classification to the utmost lengths so as in each case to individualize and strengthen the appeal, and, where a list admits of no further practicable classification for raking purposes, to individualize the follow-up as soon as the inquiries reveal utilizable differences in business, position, education, and the like.

5. *How letter is related to classifications.*—The third factor in the general process of developing leads is the letter itself. Sent to a selected, classified list, it aims to uncover those who are or may be interested. Its aim is not immediate sales. For all that, it is necessarily a selling letter and to be successful must follow all the principles and formulas laid down. It must pass muster at the six points of contact, that is, in appearance, spirit and the rest. Its proposition is not to buy, but to ask for more information. Its presentation must follow the usual formulas of logic and rhetoric, including the "Seven C's."

For example, to be Concrete, it must be as carefully and individually adapted to the different classifications as it is possible to make it. If there are twenty classifications, the best correspondents make each one individual and take just as much pains with the twentieth as with the first. The nature of the differences between the classes has been suggested in

an earlier chapter, but can only be understood in a given case by actual familiarity with the field.

As to Candor; this has a vital relation to the quality of the "leads" sought. If the house makes its letter very attractive without giving enough information to enable the readers to imagine what is coming, it may bring a deluge of inquiries, but they will be of a very low grade, and there will be a waste of material in the follow-up. If, on the other hand, it tells too much, then it will satisfy curiosity and get too few inquiries, even tho they are high grade. The successful letter must steer between these two extremes.

6. *Don't tell the reader too much.*—The object of the letter being to arouse curiosity, it is of course desirable not to satisfy this altogether or stir any motive that would counteract it. If, for example, a manufacturer of furnaces makes up a list of names of persons intending to build houses, it is not wise to tell the reader how his name was obtained, because that at once satisfies any curiosity he may have on the subject, and also tends to conjure up a mental picture of scores of other manufacturers of building and furnishing material or fixtures flooding him with letters. As such a picture might dissuade the prospect from answering the letter, there is good reason for not saying anything that would suggest it.

The need for Courtesy is of course as great as in any other kind of letter.

7. *First letter should be brief.*—Experience dictates that the first letter should ordinarily be short,

not more than a page in length; by preference not more than three-quarters of a page, since this allows more white space and does not look heavy reading.

8. *Getting display into form letters.*—The desire on the part of writers to make their form letters look "personal" is not a demand of Concreteness, or Courtesy and certainly not of Clearness. In fact, a form letter can generally be made much clearer by departing from the little fiction of having been personally dictated and frankly adopting an advertising model, as does the letter quoted on page 260. This type unquestionably has a great deal more attention-value than the ostensibly personal appeal, a fact which deprives the deception of its chief excuse.

The advantages of the advertising type of letter are in the opportunities for display, but as these are not so marked in the one page of the "rake" letter as they are in the two or more pages of the follow-up letter, we will defer further description until we come to that.

9. *We bait the letter with a secret.*—The Completeness of the inquiry-seeking letter is of course a relative completeness, to be reconciled with the purpose of the letter, which is to stimulate curiosity and provoke a request for further information. To have a secret and to be able to suggest to the reader that it is important to him is one way. To demonstrate important results in another's case and promise similar results in the reader's is another. In either case, it is a proceeding from the "known to the unknown."

The reader does not know the secret, but he knows that there is one and if it seems important he wants to know more about it, and this curiosity continues, if it is properly handled, right up to the point of sale.

The demonstration of results is similarly "known." It is also, so far as what would happen in the reader's own case is concerned, a secret. The feeling that there is something more to be learned—perhaps perception of a *new* wrinkle in an *old* method—is what drives him on from the known to the yet unknown. To be Complete must mean, then, including enough to instil curiosity, and no more.

10. *Return cards carry advertising.*—Completeness also applies to the inclosures and any other physical opportunities for helping the message. Most raking letters would inclose return cards or envelops. The card, especially, affords opportunity for impressing the prospect by tasteful printing, wording and illustrations. It may be printed in two or more colors. It may call itself "Request Card," "Kumbak Card," "Opportunity Card" or some other such name to tickle the fancy of the reader. In the place where the stamp is affixed, instead of the ordinary motto, "Please stamp here," some of these cards carry the words: "Two cents well spent," another, "Just to keep peace with the postmaster," and one of the best, "To get ahead stick stamps here."

Of course, the form letter must be Correct, in the logical, rhetorical and grammatical senses. These have been sufficiently considered.

11. *Sticking to letter that passes the test.*—The fourth and last factor in the process of adaptation is the testing of the letter. The method is described in a previous chapter of this volume and in the Text on "Advertising Campaigns." Here we need do no more than emphasize its importance and illustrate it by the practice of a large house which in the course of a year sends out many million cheaply produced form letters.

As the result of long experience this house has become almost superstitious about its letters. It first sends out a form letter to a test list of a few thousand before having it reproduced to send to the entire list, and if the letter is successful the house will not change a word in it—would not for a thousand dollars, even tho it be ungrammatical, or a number of words misspelled. If one of the inserts accompanying the letter should be printed with some of the cuts upside down or folded back, or there is anything else wrong, nevertheless, the house would have the whole edition of a million or two million copies printed the same way, without a single correction. Once the managers find out how to do a thing successfully, they will not take a chance on even the smallest change, because, as they say, they cannot tell how strong and favorable an influence even a small thing may have. The very mistakes may be an incentive to many people to read the letter and think about it.

Grammatical correctness and conventional appearance are generally desirable, but there are other re-

quirements in a letter that take precedence of these, and all together yield to the controlling fact of demonstrated success. From the business point of view, the letter that succeeds is *right.*

12. *"Follow-up" takes care of "leads."*—When a first letter produces inquiries, the task of turning these into orders is the responsibility of further letters, called in their aggregate the "follow-up." The interest of business men in this class of letters is more general and acute than it is in the inquiry-seeking type, since all inquiries are not produced by letters, but some by general advertising, while, on the other hand, all kinds of "leads" need a follow-up. The precise way of handling the inquiries will depend on whether it is intended to sell or to hold the prospect's interest until a salesman or agent can get around to see him. In any case, the principle involved is the same.

13. *Value of "lead" depends on letter.*—The receipt of the inquiry gives the follow-up a great advantage over the raking letter. If the inquiry consists of no more than a return card with a carelessly scribbled name and address, it nevertheless registers the fact that somebody is definitely interested. The extent of the interest depends on how much was told in the ad or raking letter. When much has been revealed and the prospect is still interested, the quality of his inquiry is high. When the prospect has been kept more or less in the dark, the value of his inquiry is relatively low.

It would always be possible to lighten the task of the follow-up by increasing the amount of information in the raking letter, but this removes the element of curiosity and hence cuts down the number of replies. Their quality would be better, but their number fewer. To get more replies it is advisable, as experience shows, first to appeal to curiosity and then later in a second letter give the prospect more information than it is practical to put in a first. In this way more prospects are "closed" than could be sold directly at the start.

14. *Follow-up permits more adaptation.*— Whether the follow-up is spasmodic, merely a succession of brief reminders, or really progressive; whether there are two or three letters in it or a dozen; whether it continues, as periodically with some houses, on a "buy, die or say why" basis, these letters, too, have to conform to the principles represented by the several formulas. We need touch only upon a few.

The greater information secured thru the inquiry permits of greater Concreteness in the follow-up, even when it is handled entirely by form letters, which is by no means always the case even in large mail-order houses. When, however, form letters are used, it is usually practicable in the follow-up to subdivide the lists already classified.

A house, for example, may find twenty classifications all it can make out of a general list, but with the information afforded by the return inquiry cards, it will be able to break up each of these into still

smaller classifications and send them letters still more individual and specialized. Such would be the case when from a general list of professional men there might be obtained one classification by engineers, then sub-classifications by electrical engineers and lastly by electrical engineers in public service. It is evident that a much more personal letter could be written to the last small group than to the general body of professional men, which would probably include doctors, lawyers, and clergymen.

15. *Be sure to have all the information.*—There are circumstances under which an inquiry, say one that has not been produced by advertising or letters, but is spontaneous, does not give all of the information necessary to classify the inquirer or even to show the use for which he desires the article. This letter would not ordinarily be important, but if the house receiving the inquiry is one that makes or sells machinery, for example, or articles of different kinds and qualities, it is important for it to see that the right machinery, or machinery part, or article, is provided. Otherwise the article will not give satisfaction, and the house will be blamed.

In all such cases—the rule is broad and it comes under our head of Concreteness in letter writing—the only thing to do is to get more information. Many business men and correspondents dislike to take the time to do this for fear that while they are delaying another house may walk off with the business. While

this may happen in occasional instances, it is also true that a hasty response, if based on insufficient information, may not only fail to secure the order, but even prejudice future relations. There is no question that in the long run the cautious, thorogoing policy will produce better results.

16. *Follow-up letters helped by display.*—It is unimportant whether we take up the subject of the physical character of the letter under the head of Candor, Courtesy, or Clearness. It is certainly more truthful and courteous to drop the weakening pretense of a letter's being personal, when that is not the case, and secure whatever power may be gained from an advertising treatment. Results show that the gain in clearness from it is great. Follow-up letters, even when accompanied by explanatory booklets, catalogs, folders or the like, may run into several pages and when the typing is close, as it has to be to save the cost of paper and postage, we may be sure the subject and treatment must be very interesting indeed to secure careful reading.

The growing practice now is to use some of the devices for catching and holding the attention that have proved effective in advertising booklets. For example, the solid pages will be broken by sub-headings, two or three to a page, or by side-headings, generally on the left, but sometimes alternately on one side and the other, and perhaps in red ink. Every important change of thought may be introduced by

having the first few words in capital letters. Important sentences may be put in red ink instead of being underscored.

Sometimes these mechanical means for securing attention are the very things that spell the difference between a letter's success and its failure. Cases might readily be cited where a letter written in the ordinary, business style has fallen flat and the same letter with subheadings or side-headings has later brought excellent returns.

For similar reasons it is sometimes advisable to vary the style and character of the envelops and letterheads used in the follow-up, changing the appeal to conform to it. A man who has been solicited by a piano house with letters on its regular stationery without having been much impressed might get an entirely different impression on receiving a handsomely engraved invitation to a musical recital sent out by the same company on social stationery.

17. *Display permits "personal" handling.*—Of course there is no reason in the world why the advertising or display style of letter should not be every whit as direct, personal, individual and concrete as the so-called "personal" type of form letter. Everything that can be put into one can be put into the other. The only necessary difference is in the type display. There is a small supposititious loss in deceptiveness and a great gain in credibility and clearness.

Clearness and Completeness, too, will probably dictate, when catalogs or other printed matter are used,

that the letter should refer to important passages in the matter and that these passages be marked.

We may sum up by saying that the direct advertising letter has all of the opportunities for success that come from an observance of the principles of the business letter as we have found it, and in addition the opportunity afforded by utilizing some of the principles of advertising display. How much further the practice of the latter may be carried only experience can tell.

## REVIEW

Outline the ordinary plan of mail campaigning.

What is the object of sending out letters in series?

Describe the advantages and disadvantages of the form letter in direct advertising.

How does the advertising type of form letter differ from the common type of letter?

How elaborately should lists be classified and why?

Why does classifying permit greater concreteness, courtesy, etc.?

Is it possible to be wholly sincere and helpful in a letter while strategically planning "not to tell the reader too much?"

# CHAPTER XVI

## PLANNING THE LETTER

1. *Formulas that help.*—Most specialists in letter writing would probably tell us that they do not write by formula and have no set method of approaching their tasks. This is natural and as it should be —for experts. It would not be possible for them to write with freedom and force if they had to keep one eye on a formula. They know all the principles by heart, not in an objective, cut and dried shape. Their method is to fill themselves with a given subject and then follow the inspiration of common sense or an idea. In brief, having digested the principles and made them a part of themselves, they act in accordance with them instinctively. This will be the case with every one in the degree that he becomes a successful correspondent.

In the meantime the question is how to get the principles and get them quickest. Without any doubt whatever, the way to do it is by making use of these very cut and dried rules and formulas that it is so desirable to get rid of later when we come to know them backward and forward. They do not tell everything. They must be used with the appreciation that they are only the mere mechanics of the thing and

even after they have been learned by heart will be of no use to us unless at the same time we have the indispensable knowledge of men and affairs, sympathy, imagination, business judgment and common sense to guide us in the by no means simple undertaking of bringing buyers and sellers together by mail.

But just as principles are a convenient handle by which to grasp the knowledge they cover, so, too, formulas are a convenient handle by which to control the principles, and until we cease to feel a conscious need for the knowledge and principles we shall want those handles.

2. *Applying them to letter problems.*—With due respect, then, for the formula, let us test the value of those we have cited by applying them to the building of a specific letter. Let us take first a sales letter. Happily there is one at hand on the very subject we are considering, a letter that was written to advertise a new Course in Business Correspondence offered by the publishers of a well-known business magazine. We are aware that the writer of the letter had his particular system of composition. Let us, however, while putting ourselves in his place for the time being, see how we shall fare with our own formulas.

We have, then, a course on letter-writing to sell. We wish to prepare the first of a series of letters that will be sent to a list of names made up of subscribers to our business magazine and buyers of our other business literature.

3. *The first thing is the proposition.*—The first thing that we would naturally consider would be the subject of the letter—the kind of proposition we should make. The proposition, we remember, is the real power of the letter, to which everything else is secondary. It is the message which as soon as the reader reads and understands is to make him act. It is important, and we must take pains with it.

This first message, bear in mind, is not about buying; we do not expect to be able to carry the reader's mind thru all the stages of Attention, Interest, Desire and Decision at once. With most people, we may not get any further than Interest. But that is a good beginning toward a sale. Our reader in each case may not buy at once, but he may be induced to express an interest, as by making a request for further information. On that less vital point, we shall hope to be able to lead his mind up the four steps of persuasion. What, then, in a word, can he be made to do that will show an interest in the Course?

Shall we say, "Send us your name and we will mail you literature telling all about the new Course"? That does not sound very engaging. It is, however, a beginning. Let us put it down tentatively as an inducement to write.

4. *Who and what are our readers?*—Now to whom are we going to send the letter, and what kind of people are they? What must we know about them in order to appeal to them effectively?

Fortunately, they are the same people to whom we

have been sending our magazine, to whom we have been mailing books and other courses. They are business men and the higher grade of employes. We know they are interested to a greater or less extent in all phases of business. Business men as a class are well-to-do; they are intelligent, alert, practical. With them we must talk straight to the point, tho, of course, interestingly and humanly. This is all we know, or need to know, about our thousands of prospects.

5. *Beginning to frame the letter.*—With this in mind, we give a thought to the presentation. We have to tell what the Course is, how good it is and why the readers of our letter should take it. These are fundamental points. Suppose we jot them down as subjects for paragraphs:

> What the Course is
> It will help you
> Literature on application (Proposition).

Something like this is the basis of every letter, as we see when we put it this way: *What* is it we have to talk about? *How* does it concern the other man? *What* do we want him to do, and *why* should he do it?

To strengthen these paragraph pointers, there must be, we know, a direct suggestion of action: accordingly we will provide a return card, all printed and addressed, with the indicated place to sign. We add a line about that for a paragraph subject.

Then we need something else. Our experience in selling educational courses suggests that we must be

sure to put in a word or two to meet the objection that young and unreflecting people are continually bringing forward that "you cannot learn from books; only from experience." We put that in the list of headings. We must prove that is not true.

Again, we know that it will not do to start out abruptly with a description of the Course, before the attention of the reader has been secured. As it does not at once occur to us what the gripping thought shall be, whether a "you" paragraph about results, or a striking generalization, or something else, we just put down a suggestive "Introduction."

Our list now stands:

Introduction
What the Course is
It will help you
Anybody can learn it
Literature on application
Send card.

6. *Is the inducement strong enough?*—As we look the outline over, we have the feeling that even after it is filled in with facts and illustrations it will still fall short of what is necessary for an effective letter. It may interest and convince, but we do not believe it will produce "action." It is not exciting enough. Something in the nature of a strong inducement is needed to make the reader reach for his pen.

How would it do to offer to send the Course on approval, as some publishers do their books? Would it be safe? On reflection, we feel that there may be a

difference in the circumstances. Publishers who do that advertise their offers in the magazine. There is a certain prestige derived from advertising that impresses readers and makes them more deserving of confidence. Perhaps there is a surer way for us than that. Why not offer to send merely the first lesson of the Course, as a sample? If they don't like it, they can return it. At least they ought to have sufficient curiosity to send for it. The idea sounds good. Suppose we put down a heading to cover it.

7. *Putting in a stinger to get action.*—We have our inducement, but there is something more needed —the idea of urgency. We cannot allow our prospect to read, reflect and dream on indefinitely. We must get him in action. One way to do that is by putting a time limit on the offer. He can get the first lesson if he answers at once.

8. *This suggests idea for introduction.*—This also gives us a suggestion for the introduction: why not take one or two practical points out of the First Lesson and feature them so as to make our prospect eager to read the rest?

Just as we are about to adopt this plan another and better idea pops into our head. It happens that we have on hand a supply of copies of a booklet called "The Automatic Letter Writer." It is made up of a series of form-letter paragraphs for business men. Thru its use much time may be saved in dictation. It is not expensive. Why not offer it, for a limited time, as an extra inducement? Many business men

do not know of the form letter system, or if they have heard of it, do not know how it may be used in their own business. It would be a novelty to them and, being offered free, a considerable persuasion. We adopt the idea as an attention-getter and fix up our paragraph outline to read:

Introduction
Way to save time and cut costs by Automatic Letter Writer
Can get it free by subscribing to Course
Both Automatic Letter Writer and Course will help you
Anybody can learn from Course
First Lesson shows what Course is
First Lesson and Automatic Letter Writer on application
Keep or return
Close: Send card, no money.

9. *Checking up the logic.*—This gives us a working outline. We are almost ready to fill in the facts and argument. Before doing that we wish to make sure that the argument runs straight and true from introduction to close, and does not confuse the reader in any part. So we think a minute to see what the general thought or sales argument underlying the proposition is. We finally decide it to be this:

You wish to investigate anything that experience suggests will help you in your work;
Experience suggests that this Automatic Letter Writer and Course are of such a nature;
Therefore you wish to investigate them.

We do not care to make any of these statements in so many words, but we certainly have to prove the

first two or infer their truth, and to suggest very strongly the third.

With these rails to run on, we try how our paragraph headings reduce to formal argument. Some of them, being mere offers or explanation, undergo no change. With the others expanded, our notes appear:

You would welcome a way to save time in dictation and "cut the costs." This Automatic Letter Writer is such a way. Therefore you would welcome it.

You can get the Letter Writer free, if you act at once.

Our liberal offer: the Letter Writer free with our new Course in Business Correspondence.

Both Letter Writer and Course have helped others greatly in the solution of their problems. Your problems are of the same nature as those of others. Therefore, the Letter Writer and Course will greatly help you.

Success of any kind may be had by anyone thru following the known principles underlying it. The principles of success in letter writing are known. Therefore anybody can write successful letters by following the known principles of success in letter writing.

When the principles are clear, you can master them. They are made clear in the Course. Therefore you can master them thru reading the Course.

You can get an idea of the value of a thing by sampling it. You can readily sample the Course thru its First Lesson. Therefore you can get an idea of the value of the Course this way.

With this sample First Lesson, you get the Letter Writer free.

If you are satisfied, keep them both.

If not, return them.

Send no money, merely use the mail card.

This is straightforward reasoning; our argument

stays on the track from start to finish. If it is supported by facts, it will satisfy the demands of the intellect. But the intellect is not everything. It is only the smaller part of man. Does the letter touch a feeling? Evidently not. In the present shape it is dead; no one would read it. The repetitions in the argument are tedious. We must get rid of them, add facts that explain and interest, and then liven the whole with a little emotional coloring. Rhetoric will tell us how to do that.

So we strike out some of the repetitions. It is not necessary, for example, to keep all of the first paragraph. It is enough to convey the thought that "This Letter Writer saves time, cuts costs, etc." The mind of the reader will supply the rest of the argument. And so on thruout the letter; one or another of the various "premises" or "conclusions" can be dispensed with.

10. *Filling in the facts.*—Now for the facts. In the first paragraph we must set down the most important benefits of the Letter Writer. Besides cutting costs and saving time directly, it prevents annoying delays and does away with the danger of losing business and good-will because of hurriedly dictated letters. This will certainly touch the reader in a sensitive place.

Then the facts about getting the Letter Writer free with the Course, if the reader acts at once. And the facts about the Course, that it is the work of an expert with a fifteen years' record of results, and

contains all that the business magazine has learned about letters during the nineteen years it has been in existence. The reader ought to be interested in that.

And the facts about how it will help him personally. how it will crack the "hard nuts" among his problems, get under the skin of indifferent prospects, and the like—a picture of the reader's own experience and longings. Nothing could be more gripping than a promise of sure relief.

The facts, next, about ability in letter writing, how one does not have to be born with it, but can acquire it thru a study of principles, which are made clear in the Course. This would certainly add fuel to hope.

Lastly, the exact facts about the proposition, which were suggested earlier, but not given in detail. The reader is to get Lesson One as a sample of the Course and with it the Letter Writer. If he agrees to take the Course, he may keep both, otherwise he is to return them. We trust him—a proposition that ought to prove attractive.

11. *Tested by the sales formula.*—So far, so good. We are now ready, before the final stringing together of all the facts into the presentation, to test them by the sales formula. Does the introduction get Attention? Do the other points lead up thru Interest and Desire to Decision? Is immediate action provided for? Is it made logical? Is there any inducement to it?

Our first paragraph, tho not written out, would probably read roughly about like this:

> There is a way to cut the costs of correspondence, prevent annoying delays and do away with much of the danger of losing business and good-will because of hurriedly dictated letters. The *Automatic* way of handling dictation enables a man to do all this.

We see at once that it has very little attention-getting quality. The reader, being a business man, will be only too familiar with claims as to cutting costs and saving time. He will probably discount our assertion about 90 per cent. There is nothing in the paragraph to stir his curiosity and no novelty, no change. It does not introduce any interesting "known" to bridge over the gap between the reader's interest and the "unknown" Letter Writer. It paints no "picture" and makes no appeal to any of the motives of entertainment: the vital, unusual, uncertain, similar, antagonistic, animate and concrete. It is just plain dull.

The thought itself, however, is good. It only needs in some way to be energized. Can we put it into a picture? We might describe the advantages to the reader. That would not be a very politic thing to do in the first paragraph. His mind not having been prepared, he would be skeptical. We had better use some one else's experience. Could that be an actual case, with name and address given? The Course is still new and the experience of others is too recent to have produced important results. So we cannot use

an actual case. Probably a real name would not mean anything, anyway, to most persons. But there is nothing to prevent our taking an imaginary, typical case and picturing it. If we "dramatize" it with action and quotation marks, it will become "known" by its similarity to the reader's own office experience. So we try that.

With Attention assured, we go on down the line. The detail of the facts and the free offer will hold the reader's Attention until he comes to the statement of how he personally will be helped—then enters Interest. Right here, too, we notice, after the earlier Picture, comes the Promise. As a matter of fact, we want Picture all the way thru, if we can get it, and, in suggestion at least, Promise, too.

The reader, we may assume, is now interested. But perhaps he is doubtful. "Can I get anything out of books?" he asks himself. Another paragraph shows him that he can, whereupon to Interest succeeds Desire. Promise, too, has been strengthened by Proof, the reference to general experience being of that nature.

The proposition in the next to last paragraph explaining the free offer and the chance to test both book and Course by free examination and trial may be expected to remove the last doubt in the way of full Confidence and Desire, while the final paragraph telling him to "send no money, but merely mail the card" is the Push that brings about Decision.

We have now planned our letter with adequate

painstaking. In the next chapter we shall see how we shall go about writing and criticizing it. We shall also test the same system of formulas by other letters.

## REVIEW

Describe the meaning and use of formulas.
Can they take the place of thinking? If not, why not?
Do they weaken the powers of imagination and originality?
How long need those who use formulas depend upon them?
What, if anything, would you substitute for a formula?
Is a plan a formula? If not, why not?
Compare this letter outline here given with the plan of some of the letters you have received or written.
Try to work out an attractive outline of your own.

## CHAPTER XVII

### WRITING THE LETTER

1. *Write with somebody in mind.*—Very well, the outline described having stood analysis, we proceed to write our letter. Following the custom of most successful writers, we write with a particular person in mind. We pick out a friend or acquaintance to represent a typical subscriber and write "at" him. What would probably please him will probably please the subscriber and what would probably go against his grain would probably repel the subscriber, too. Our friend is in imagination the "dog we try it on."

2. *Is the letter Concrete, Candid, etc.?*—Suppose the letter written—and we shall come to it in a moment—what then? We read it over, do we not, for further criticism? We check it up by the requirements of a good letter, the formula of the "Seven C's."

We decide that it is Concrete, that is, that it views the proposition thru the reader's eyes and shows what the Letter Writer and Course would mean to him personally in specific, material ways. It anticipates any doubts or objections that he may have, and considerately explains them away. Perhaps we work it

over a little more to make it thoroly natural to him and such as he would find agreeable to read.

We decide that it is Candid. It does not pretend to be a "personal" communication. It will frankly show itself, by the heading we shall put on it, a form letter. It is possible that some of the Promises might be considered a shade too enthusiastic, but we reason that our prospects, as a select class, are fully capable of realizing them. A more guarded Promise would not come up to the actual possibilities. We let the statements stand.

Due Courtesy is observed.

To make the letter Clear, we prune away a few meaningless and redundant words that had crept in. We also connect the sentences so that one thought runs smoothly into the next. We cut down the paragraphs to not more than ten or twelve lines each and introduce several paragraphs of a line or two apiece to break the monotony of so many long ones. We spend a little time on the first lines of each paragraph to make them gripping. Two or three places are dull, and as to be dull is not to be Clear, we go after these places and brighten them up by turning them into pictures with action—moving pictures—and projecting the reader into them. Instead of saying, for example, that "a man can do," we say, "*your* letters *will* command."

Lastly, we check over every word to see that it is not only exact but as vivid, picturesque and moving as common sense and good taste will permit. We

take a sentence that reads: "Your dictation will be greatly speeded up" and make it read: "Your every-day dictation will be *eaten up* by the Automatic," etc. Instead of "impressing the customer," we say "impressing the other fellow."

We decide that the letter is not quite Complete as it stands, with a return card, and that it would be helped by a synopsis of the Course. We put that into a "thumbnail" booklet and inclose it in a tiny envelope. This is not only "different" and likely to get attention, but it costs less in paper and postage than a larger booklet would. In the miniature booklet we put, too, more selling talk and two or three illustrations. None of this, we decide, will take the edge off the reader's curiosity. It should whet his appetite for the First Lesson.

We have made the letter Concise by using the fewest possible words, facts and illustrations necessary to convey our whole meaning and give the right impression. The letter covers two pages but that is not long, all things considered: our prospects know us.

Lastly, we make sure that the letter is Correct at every point; that it conforms to house policy, makes a proposition that consults the best interests of both house and prospect, that the presentation is written from the reader's point of view, that in appearance, logic, grammar and spelling, the letter is irreproachable.

3. *The letter written.*—The finished product reads:

The Automatic Way of Writing
Letters—FREE—Read this Letter

*Dear Sir.*

"4-18-69," "3-11-18," "450-1152," "140-74-29." Hudson jotted down these figures and a half-dozen words on a pad and handed them to his stenographer. Then he glanced at his watch. It had taken him exactly two minutes to figure out those combinations.

In these two minutes he had disposed of several fairly important business letters.

For he had found the way to cut the cost of correspondence, prevent annoying delays and to do away with much of the danger of losing business and good-will because of hurriedly dictated letters. The *Automatic* method of handling dictation enables a man to do all this. For in order to answer most of your every-day correspondence all you need to do is to pick up the AUTOMATIC LETTER-WRITER, jot down on each letter a few paragraph numbers, and hand the letters to the stenographer. She will do the rest, and you can feel certain that each letter will have a strong, effective PERSONAL reply.

But you can secure a copy of the AUTOMATIC LETTER-WRITER absolutely FREE, if you act at once. For we are making this liberal offer for a short time only, to subscribers to *System's* new Course in Business Correspondence—containing the condensed experience of Herbert Watson, the expert letter-writer, who for fifteen years has been helping business men in every part of the country to make more money out of letters—and containing all that *System* has learned about business-getting letters of every kind during the nineteen years it has been building up an international organization, largely thru the use of advertising and the mail.

Sounds almost unreasonable, doesn't it?

It's your special, highly-important letters with which this Course concerns itself—your every-day dictation will be eaten up by the AUTOMATIC LETTER-WRITER. If

you have on your books an important customer who for some reason has quit buying from you, who cannot be gotten to budge from his position, who is indifferent alike to the visits of salesmen and ambassadors, to telephone calls and entreating letters—then this Course is the answer, for it will enable you to write the kind of a letter that creeps in under indifference and opposition—slyly influencing—until your prospect unconsciously does what you want him to do. Just so this Course will enable you to write every kind of a business letter—collection, sales, adjustment—any kind you can think of—in such a way, with such simple words, that your letter will command attention, incite respect and develop action.

Must you be a "born" letter-writer to get results from this Course?

No, indeed! For successful letter-writing—like success in life itself—is not a natural gift, but comes to those—and *only* to those—who understand the simple principles of impressing the "other fellow" with the truth of what you say, of stirring up his enthusiasm, and, finally, of persuading him to your own way of thinking. And these simple principles are made daylight clear in this Course—so easy to understand and follow that once you have mastered them you will find yourself unconsciously applying its result-getting principles in every phase of your daily life. (See booklet inclosed.)

Send no money. Take no risk. Merely mail the card.

The letter was selected for analysis because its subject is the same as that of our Text and, being acquainted with the supporting arguments, we are able to reach a sounder judgment regarding it than we might with a letter on a different subject. The writer of the letter is not responsible for our analysis and formulas. He used a different method of approach and composition. The principles in either case are,

however, the same, and necessarily with the same facts and ideas produce similar results.

4. *Standardizing the routine.*—But let us sum up what we did in regard to the letter, and see how near we can come to reducing it to a formula for application to all kinds of letters. Suppose that this time we put the points in the form of questions to be asked of ourselves; the questions would give us this outline:

Preliminary:

What proposition will suit the house and please the readers?

Who are our readers? What kind of people?—What kind of lives and ambitions? Education?

(*a*) Letter basis from reader's point of view:

"*What* is it?" (Article)

"*How* does it concern me?" (Utility)

"*What* do you want me to do and *why* should I do it?" (Proposition)

(*b*) Letter expanded by analysis; still from reader's point of view:

"Does the letter interest me at the start?" (Introduction)

"What is it?" (Description of Article)

"How does it concern me?" (Explanation of Utility)

"How can you prove it?" (Proof)

"*What* do you want me to do and *why* should I do it?" (Proposition)

"Why act now?" (Inducement)

"Why act *this very minute?*" (Push)

(*c*) In the case of an inducement being featured in the introduction, the points will be covered by the following questions:

"Does the letter grip at the start?" (Introduction)

"What is it?" (Inducement)

"How does it concern me?" (Utility of Inducement)

"Why is it given?" (Mention of Article)

"What is it?" (Description of Article)
"How does it concern me?" (Utility of Article)
"How can you prove it?" (Proof)
"What do you want me to do and why should I do it?" (Proposition)
"Why act now?" (Inducement repeated)
"Why act this very minute?" (Push)

Which type of outline, *a*, *b*, or *c*, is best adapted to the letter I wish to write?

What is the complete, formal, logical statement of each point to be argued?

What are the facts and ideas required for each point?

Does the sales formula of "Attention—Interest—Desire—Decision" apply?

Does the rhetorical formula of "Picture—Promise—Prove—Push" apply?

After the letter is written:

Does the formula of the "Seven C's" apply: Is the presentation "Concrete—Candid—Courteous—Clear—Complete—Concise—Correct?"

5. *Variations are possible.*—Doubtless these formulas will not be suitable for every letter we want to write. Occasionally, for some reason we may wish to vary the order. We may wish to split a point up into several paragraphs or combine it with several points in one paragraph. At the same time, we have a good working outline that will meet most needs and prove serviceable in giving us a facility in construction. It will be time enough to experiment with variations after we have mastered it.

6. *Analyzing an investment letter.*—Before leaving the subject, let us test the outline by one or two other examples and see what accommodations may be

necessary. The following letter is quoted by Robert Ruxton in his booklet on "The Art of Resultful Letter Writing,"[1] as one that was sent to a select list of investors and brought in 45 per cent of replies, a very high percentage:

Attention (Picture)

Men made iron and steel for many years, yet it remained for the latter half of the nineteenth century to revolutionize the industry and to give growth and multiplication to "A thousand millionaires."

Men "in steel," while this magic change was in progress, made fortunes, literally "over night"; its history has proven a romance of industry.

Interest (Promise)

And it is about to be duplicated—not in steel, but in another industry that stands in the same position in which steel stood half a century ago.

It is ripe for revolution—and revolution is upon it—it also will make "A thousand millionaires."

Today it presents one of the most promising openings for capital—large or small—it is possible to conceive.

The conditions governing it are extraordinary—unique—its promise is spectacular—it will not only duplicate, but exceed the marvelous record of steel.

(Offer to Prove)

May we tell you about it?

Desire (Promise)

You can share with us in the rewards just ahead.

We have prepared a brochure for limited distribution among men we believe will be interested in the *facts:* it is expensive, and we do not wish to mail it to you without the assur-

[1] "The Art of Resultful Letter Writing," by Robert Ruxton, Director of Plans and Copy of The Dando Company, Philadelphia, Pa.

ance that it will be at least *read.* If you would like to read it, and will make request on inclosed postal, this brochure will be mailed to you entirely without expense or obligation.

May we send it?

In preparing this inquiry-bringing letter, the writer used the sales formula as a string on which to thread his ideas. His proposition to the reader is to send for a booklet telling how to get in on the ground floor of a very big investment. He could have told the reader what the investment was, but without some strong attention-getting device the latter would not have absorbed enough of his facts and figures to be impressed. By making a mystery of the matter, he stimulates the reader's curiosity and induces him to send for the booklet containing the information.

7. *Answering the questions.*—Our present question is not, however, how a trained writer would prepare the letter, but how the beginner might attempt it. The slower way would doubtless be more helpful.

According to this, we would first frame the general proposition as to the investment, then we would study our lists of investors and as a result of the study we would prepare the inquiry-bringing proposition with the millionaire-making secret as its basis.

Then we would take the short set of questions, (a), and answer them thus:

"What is it?" A money-making secret.

"How does it concern me?" You can use it to make a fortune.

"Why should I write?" The cost of learning the secret is so little; it means so much.

Now expand that:

"Does it grip from the start?" Think of the "thousand millionaires," "fortune made over night," and "the magic change" about to be "duplicated."

"What is it?" We can afford to tell the secret only to those who are interested.

"How does it concern me?" You can make a fortune for yourself.

"How can you prove it?" The proof is in the booklet.

"What do you want me to do and why should I do it?" Send for the booklet, if you want to make a fortune.

"Why act *now?*" The number of copies of the booklet is limited.

"Why act *this minute?*" Pressure on this class of readers is not advisable. The question, however, invites an immediate reply.

8. *Presentation logically outlined.*—The presentation and its argument, logically stated, may be thus outlined.

Steel made a thousand millionaires who "got in" before its rise. "This" is like steel before its rise. Therefore "this" will make a thousand millionaires.

May we tell you about it?

There are rewards ahead for those who know. We know. Therefore there are rewards ahead for us.

There are also rewards ahead for those with whom we share the knowledge. We are willing to share the knowl-

edge with you. Therefore there are rewards ahead for you.

We will give the information, without expense or obligation, to a few who ask for it.

May we send it to you?

Now it is a far cry from this chain of lifeless argument to the vivid letter previously quoted. The difference is in the mind of the writer. A method does not supply thought and inspiration, it only guides them. But given the thought and inspiration, they must needs have followed some such method as this in reaching an adequate expression. The writer of the letter shows how the sales formula fits it; and we may also identify for ourselves the points corresponding to our "Picture—Promise—Prove—Push."

The sales and rhetorical formulas are shown arranged at the side of the letter. It will be found that the "Seven C's" similarly fit.

9. *How it fits an adjustment letter.*—Here is a letter of a different kind, quoted in an article by Paul W. Kearney in the *Mailbag*. It is an adjustment letter written by a house which shipped its goods "transportation collect" to another house which thereupon deducted the charges from the face of the bill in making remittance. The writer of the article explains that to return the check and say you want the whole bill because it is against the house's policy to allow the item would be "flirting with a break." "Such an explanation is no explanation at all. Details help." The following letter is suggested as calculated to smooth things over:

It is too bad that the salesman who took your last order did not explain that the terms on which all of our goods are shipped are f. o. b. point of shipment.

The reason is easily explained: for some considerable time our cost accountants worked on this particular problem with a view towards deciding exactly the most desirable method of distributing transportation expense.

The decision was that if we prepaid this item on all orders we would have to raise the price of the line. You know, we send about 20,000 consignments of goods every month to points all over the United States, and the charges on the total would run pretty high for a year and would cut a bit deeply into our normal profits.

On the other hand, if we raised the price of the line, you would be suffering an injustice because you would help pay for the express charges some other man incurred. According to the books, you received $345.00 worth of merchandise last month and you paid the freight on it. But the Blank Department Store of Louisville bought $2,000.00 worth of goods in the same period—and they paid their own freight.

If we carried that item on our books and raised the general prices to cover it, you would pay more, in the long run, than your own transportation—you would pay for the expressage of our other dealers, too. And that wouldn't be fair.

By saving 5c each on 50 articles in a shipment, you more than cover your expressage. Doesn't that strike you as being the proper way to handle the situation?

We need not repeat the whole process of construction. The first paragraph is gripping enough, considering the subject. "What is it?" is also answered there. "How does it concern me?" is answered in the first two lines of the third paragraph and at greater length below. "How can you prove it?" occupies the

middle of the letter. The "inducement" suggested is being "fair," and some "urgency" is imparted by the question in the last paragraph, which calls for a reply.

"Picture" is in the first paragraph, and all thru the letter. "Promise" is in the second and next to last paragraphs. "Proof," as we saw, is in the third, fourth and fifth. "Push" is in the last paragraph: "Doesn't that strike you as being the proper way to handle the situation?" It calls, as said, for a reply.

"Attention" is aroused by the first paragraph and deepened into "Interest" by the second and third. "Desire" to assume the transportation charge is probably established by the last two, and "Decision" by the last.

10. *Summing up the case for the formula.*—The serious student of business correspondence will early realize that methods of composition and formulas for learning and testing them are the least part of the art. The vital thing is to have the facts of quality, economy and service on our side, and where, as in collection and adjustment letters, there is the further question of right and truth, then these, also. But vastly greater as these matters are, nevertheless, to be effective, they have to be expressed and in being expressed they fall under the laws of composition. So that, in the end, we come back again to our rules and formulas. To the beginner they will be a help; the expert will forget them before they begin to hamper.

## REVIEW

Compare the plan in the letters you write or receive with the formulas given here.

Try to suggest some other ways in which the letters might be written.

Would you, for example, begin a letter by mentioning a price, then say you wanted the reader to pay it, then describe the utility of the article to him and lastly tell what the article is? Why would that order of facts be wrong?

What makes a given order of facts natural?

Write or dictate a few letters without using any plan or formula, and compare them with planned letters.

# CHAPTER XVIII

## MECHANICAL FORM

1. *As before, "the public be pleased."*—The best way to decide the quality of our stationery, the character of our letterheads, the style of the typing and the other details of mechanical form in a letter is to look at them as we looked at the letter itself, that is, thru the eyes of the reader. This is because, at last, all questions of good form or business etiquette, like those of esthetics, simmer down to a matter of giving pleasure, and in business giving pleasure has a definite sales importance.

It comes to this even when executives talk of getting up stationery "in keeping with the dignity and traditions of the house"; what they have in mind is the effect on the customer. The sales power of even the most severe and fastidious taste in letterheads is great if they go to people of like sensibility. On the other hand they would probably fall flat with people of another class, and be deemed weak and insipid.

To say what shall please and to decide between the seemingly conflicting claims of conventionality and originality, or "art" and "advertising," is not an easy thing.

2. *Conventional is the appropriate.*—Conven-

tional styles are styles used by common consent—common styles. In point of fact, however, we generally have more than that in mind when we speak of conventional styles; we generally mean, not the good, bad and indifferent, but the best of such styles, those adopted by the most progressive houses. But these houses range all the way from packing, grocery, coal and junk to banking, jewelry and silk houses and differ as widely in their dignity and traditions, and in the character of their customers. A conventional "best" means one thing in one line and something different in another. In any case, it is the leading houses' guess at what most pleases or impresses their customers. Not originality or art or esthetics, but appropriateness is what they have sought, the very quality, in short, to which we gave first place in the formula of "Seven C's"—Concreteness.

It does not follow, of course, that the leading houses are necessarily right in their choice, that they are giving the customers what the latter want or that they want only one style of thing. Styles change and the taste of the public is notoriously fickle.

All this is true and there is room for originality and experiment, and yet there is the fact: the big successful houses do so-and-so; before we strike out on a new trail we want to be sure that we are right, and not merely eccentric.

3. *Good taste and conventionality.*—Styles change, but all styles are not good and all changes are not made by successful houses. Where good taste

prevails, the changes are few and slight. The reason is that good taste is based on principles. It is what, in the long run, the best people like; best in this sense signifying those most critical, most thoughtful, artistic and sensitive to impressions. In the long run, all that is ugly or clumsy or in other ways displeasing goes into the discard and all the things that are beautiful and harmonious, that look as if thought and feeling had gone into them, are left to delight the world. Mistakes are made in the process, and new things are continually coming up to change and modify, but in the long run matters improve. It is the same with stationery, typing and the other mechanical details of letters.

4. *Character of the field the big factor.*—In determining our own style, therefore, we need to know, first, what is good taste; and second, how far our field wants or appreciates it. Good taste is really not our first criterion, but what the field wants; and what the field wants, in the opinion of the best practical judges, is the conventional style. Thus we are back at the post, but with this piece of wisdom to show for our excursion: when we are dealing with customers who are persons of taste we can safely follow the best examples in the best field, because these are based on art principles; when we are dealing with customers of another kind, our problem is to adapt the experience of the most progressive houses and the best fields to the differing circumstances. Much thought, inquiry and very likely experiment may be

required to find the right ways. In some lines, we must follow the beaten track; in others we may be as original as we please without incurring the reproach of eccentricity.

5. *Quality in the paper.*—Applying these principles first, for example, to the quality of the letterhead, we shall probably agree that, expense aside, it is well to go as far in the direction of quality as we can without appearing pretentious. Much, as before said, depends on the line and the standing of the house. The broad rule is to give the customer what will please and favorably impress him and this of course varies with circumstances.

Quality includes color. Some houses have increased their returns from direct advertising by using tinted paper stock.

6. *How far to go with printing.*—The same principles apply with the printing, lithographing, engraving or embossing of the letterhead. It should be prepared with reference to the best examples in one's own line. If the best houses in the line are carrying advertising legends or pictures down one side or have double sheets with advertising and colors inside, then that is the convention in that line; people are used to it; the taste of the line does not consciously demand anything more "esthetic" and it is questionable, on the whole, if it would be sufficiently impressed by anything "better" to warrant giving it. The reader should collect letterheads in his own and other lines and study them in the light of what has been said.

Only thus can he be sure of choosing what is appropriate, that is, *concrete,* to his line.

7. *Conventions that govern typing.*—Typing, likewise, has its conventions as to appearance and readability. We do not like a letter sprawling all over the page, therefore it must be compact. We do not like it so compact that we cannot read it easily, so, while the paragraphs are single spaced, we like double-spacing between them. To balance a short letter to the eye, we like our margins deep; it must look neat and tasteful. If it is only two or three lines long, it may be double-spaced to avoid the appearance of excessive brevity. If it should crowd or exceed the page, then double-space it. If double spacing would make three or four pages, then single-space it, with double spaces between the paragraphs, and make the paragraphs short. The rules are all based on common sense.

In this Text no attempt is made to print letters in the commercial form. To save space they are printed from margin to margin.

8. *The parts of the letter.*—Other rules concern the several parts of the letter—the heading, the address, the salutation, the body, the complimentary close, the signature and the initialed information in a lower corner to show who dictated and who typed the letter. The heading or letterhead has been described. The address of the writer should be given, usually at the top, tho it may be at the bottom, to the left.

9. *Address and salutation vary in style.*—The name and address may be "stepped," that is, the

second line beginning farther in and the third beyond that; or it may be typed in block form, each line beginning flush with the left margin. The latter seems more favored at the present time.

The punctuation of the date and the address is largely a matter of preference. The best usage seems to be to punctuate fully the *echelon* or "stepped" style, but in the block style to omit the final punctuation, in imitation of display advertising and inscriptions of all kinds. Abbreviations, even if final, are always punctuated.

Any way of writing the date that is easily read is permissible. For the same reason, putting it all in figures—12–5–20—is not in good form; it takes more time to interpret and is confusing.

The salution ("Dear Sir" or "Gentlemen") may be placed either at the extreme margin or else indented, and the body of the letter may begin a line below either where the salutation leaves off or else flush with the margin.

10. *Indented or block stule in paragraphs.*—Paragraphs are also indented as to the first line where the address is "stepped" or in *echelon,* but may be either indented or begin flush with the left margin when the address is in block. Some business houses prefer to make all lines begin at the extreme left and while this has been criticized as a device to save a typist's time, experience has proved it to be at once attractive and possibly more readable than the other style of indented paragraphs, since the eye after finishing

each line goes back approximately the same distance to the same margin. What has been said refers to letters that are single spaced, with double spacing between paragraphs. The style is less agreeable for letters wholly double spaced. Either arrangement is at present used by a limited number of houses and therefore must still be considered a radical departure from the long established and unquestionably successful customs of writing the English language.

11. *"Attention of Mr. ——."*—Where, on account of request or custom, it is desired to address a company but reach an individual in it, some such heading as "Attention of Mr. ——," is placed after the address, either flush with the left margin or to the right, in the center, often being underscored. This is also a convenient method to use when the initials of the addressee are not known. When the whole name is not known it may be directed as, for example, "Attention of the Credit Manager."

Custom differs as to whether the salutation following should be addressed to the concern or the individual. Logic might seem to require that since the company has been addressed, the salutation should be "Gentlemen," but the general practice is rather the reverse and the salutation is "Dear Mr. ——" or "Dear Sir," since this is actually more in keeping with the character and tone of the letter and the intention of the writer.

12. *Do not drop the "Mr."*—Dropping titles, as many houses do, is a bad place to practice economy,

Mr. Brown expects to be addressed in letters, even by his friends and still more by strangers and business houses, as "Mr. A. B. Brown." To address him as "A. B. Brown" is only less presuming than to address him as "Brown." If the letter is important to him, he will attend to it on its merits, but he will not do so with any good-will and where there is a chance for preference it will be exercised in favor of the house or person who treats him with respect.

"Mr.," "Mrs.," "Miss," "Messrs." (never "Mess."), "Hon.," "Rev.," "Dr.," "Col.," and the like should always be used when they are appropriate. Courtesy is the standard: "What does he like or expect?" The right title should be used. A married woman resents being addressed as "Miss," or an unmarried woman as "Mrs." A colonel would object to being called "Major" and a captain might scent sarcasm in being written "General."

Other instances are indicated in the following list illustrating good usage:

Mr. A. B. Brown.

A. B. Brown, Esq. (seldom used except to or by lawyers).

(The) Rev. John Adams (Rev. Adams is wrong).

(The) Rev. Dr. John Adams.

(The) Rev. John Adams, D.D.

Gen. Alexander Hamilton.

(The) Hon. Horatio Millett.

The Honorable Mr. Millett (Hon. Millett is wrong).

(The Messrs.) Robert Fulton & Co.

The Robert Fulton Company, unless the company itself dispenses with the "The."

Professor H. W. Longfellow.

President A. S. Lowell.

13. *Conventional salutations.*—In salutations, the conventional form of address is "Dear Sir," "Gentlemen," "Dear Madam," and, if a firm is composed of women, "Ladies." "Sir or Sirs" are seldom used, except in official communications. "Dear Sirs" has been replaced by "Gentlemen." "My dear Sir" and "My dear Madam" are very formal. "My dear Mr. Brown" is more formal than "Dear Mr. Brown," but both suggest acquaintance or intimacy and neither should be used ordinarily in addressing a stranger. "My dear Doctor," "My dear Congressman," "My dear Mr. Secretary," "My dear Colonel," "My dear Professor," are less formal than "Dear Dr. Jones," and the like.

Official letters take "Sir" for the salutation. Titles are always used and are not abbreviated. Titles of a business nature are written in full after the name; "Mr. C. M. White, General Manager." Even if the government official or corporation officer is an intimate friend, custom dictates that the address on the envelop and in the letter shall be duly formal, tho the salutation may be as intimate as acquaintance permits.

14. *The close and near-close.*—In closing the letter, the best practice has discarded most old-fashioned

expressions, like "We beg to remain," or "We remain," "Trusting to hear from you soon," and "Hoping that this will appeal to you." The modern idea is for the writer to stop when he has said all. There will be no suggestion of abruptness in closing if the body of the letter has the proper tone. Most letters asking for a decision will naturally carry an intimation to that effect at the end, but this is best expressed in a more positive way than by "hoping" or "trusting" which are now held to be the mere husks of suggestion. "We believe this will appeal to you," or "We believe you will be glad to get this quotation," carries more force. In writing a business acquaintance on matters not directly relating to sales, it is permissible to conclude with a conventional expression of interest, as "With kind regards and best wishes," or simply "With best wishes." As before said, however, these add nothing to the letter, if its tone is otherwise cordial.

The safe, conventional close is "Yours truly," or with more cordiality, "Yours very truly," or "Very truly yours." "Sincerely yours," is more intimate, and "Sincerely" still more so. "Cordially yours" is a social form and is only borrowed for business uses under exceptional circumstances to express a deeper feeling than "Sincerely" conveys. "Faithfully yours," has not been established in business usage in this country, as it has in England.

15. *Signatures should be recognizable.*—The signature should be legible, or else be interpreted. It

has been the custom of many houses to print the name of the writer of the letter at the left lower corner of the letter, together with the initials or number of the typist. Another way, which appears to be gaining in favor, is to type the name of the writer where his signature will later appear.

Individual responsibility before the law is avoided by signing the firm's name first and below it one's own, preceded by "by" or "per." The title of the writer should be given unless it appears in the letterhead. An unmarried woman may use "Miss" in parenthesis before her name to insure the right address in reply. A married woman will sign her own name, as "Mary Adams," and afterward her married name in parenthesis, "(Mrs. John Quincy Adams)." If she is widowed her signature will be "(Mrs.) Mary Adams."

16. *Good form in envelops.*—Envelops will naturally correspond in style and taste with letterheads. Those going to other business houses, particularly large business houses, are, as said, not seen by the executives and there is no point in making an advertising display on them. The case is different when the letter goes to small business men or to the public.

The large envelop, requiring a letterhead to be folded only twice, horizontally, is gradually being preferred to the small one. At a recent convention of the Better Letters Association it was reported that five per cent of the membership used them wholly. Thirty per cent of the concerns were said to use

"window" or "outlook" envelops for bills, statements, etc., and ten per cent to use them for general correspondence. It was considered inadvisable to send them to those who open their own mail.

17. *Inclosures neat and well folded.*—Mail-order authorities insist that inclosures should be in harmony with the letter. A crude inclosure would partly destroy the effect of a good letterhead and letter. If the inclosure is folded, the folding should be neat. It is a good practice to clip small inclosures to the back of the letter rather than the front.

18. *Excellence important, its cost slight.*—To sum up, the mechanical form of the letter, while a matter of the least importance as compared with the other details, is nevertheless worth while making the most of. The difference in cost between the worst and the best is slight; the difference in sales and good-will quality, however, is incalculable.

### REVIEW

What is "good form" in stationery, printing and typing? What makes it good form?

Why is good form not the same in all fields?

What is the value of conventionality in form from the sales point of view?

Why is good form appreciated by others?

What are the bounds of originality?

What are the human reasons for the differences in conventional salutations? Why, for example, is "My Dear Mr. Brown" more formal than "Dear Mr. Brown"?

What is the reason for the conventional signature of a married woman, an unmarried woman and a widow?

# CHAPTER XIX

## GETTING THE MOST OUT OF WORDS

1. *The scientific approach.*—In the preceding chapters we discussed the use of words from a somewhat rough-and-ready point of view. Now, with a nucleus of principles in hand, we are ready to enlarge our stock by borrowing from the scientific and more or less traditional theory of composition. We are not after rules of grammar. We are still seeking the sources of power in words. How can we use them, how can we put them together in sentences and paragraphs so as to get the most out of them?

The viewpoint is thus unchanged. Our letter must, as before, secure the reader's confidence and win him over to our will. Instead, however, of starting, as previously, with an analysis of the letter, we will this time begin with an analysis of the mental processes involved.

2. *Double process of conviction and persuasion.*—The process is a double one. First, we try to make the reader believe; second, we try to make him feel. If he believes and feels strongly enough, he will do as we desire. He may believe without feeling, in which case there is no action; and he may feel without wholly believing, and act, in which case there is danger of dissatisfaction coming later. In order to satisfy

our customer permanently, we must deserve his confidence and please him, both. The first process is one of *convincing,* the other of *persuasion.*

3. *One appeals to head, other to heart.*—The two processes are exercised on different parts of the reader's nature. In order to convince him, we appeal to his *intellect,* but to persuade him we direct the appeal to his *feelings.*

4. *Ideas for head, images for heart.*—As to the exact manner in which the two appeals register, there is some difference of opinion among scientific men. We shall avoid confusion by passing over the debated matters and coming directly to the undisputed fact that the sensations which the reader receives in his mind from the words seen in our letter give instant rise to thoughts, then pictures, and afterward, perhaps almost immediately afterward, to feelings. Technically, the thoughts are *ideas* and the mental pictures *images.* Prof. C. S. Baldwin has developed this phase of the subject in his books on composition, and it is worth exploring.

The distinction between ideas and images is one we make in everyday life. We witness, for example, a street scene, but do not understand it. "What's the idea?" we ask. "What does it mean?" Or somebody relates a remarkable occurrence and we say, "I can't imagine it!" That is, we hear and understand, but cannot see it. The two elements, however, are never far apart. Every idea suggests an image, however faint, and every image carries some

idea. Image in this sense, as before said, means a sound, taste, touch or smell, whether perceived or recalled, as well as a sight.

The elements necessarily come from a letter in one order: first, the idea represented by the word or sentence, and afterward the image suggested by the sense of it; last of all, the feeling. Idea, image, emotion —understanding, picture, want—is the order that leads to action. We cannot want until we have pictured the object of our want, and we cannot picture it from words until we know what the words mean.

The process involved in reading a letter is somewhat as follows. The reader grasps the sense of the first few words and almost simultaneously begins to picture the ideas. Then as he reads on he adds new ideas and sees the original picture in a changing light. And so the process goes on, adding ideas and building up a composite picture. There will be, in effect, if the letter is a good one, several or many ideas all contributing to one big idea, and several or many little pictures all merging and making up one big and vivid one.

Now, with the understanding that ideas and images are of equal importance, let us take them up in turn.

5. *To develop ideas, exhibit and argue.*—Let us start with the idea. Say that we have one for a letter. How shall we develop it, which means developing other ideas from it? Broadly speaking, there are two ways of doing it. One of them is exposition, the other argumentation.

6. *How to develop by exposition.*—Exposition has several forms. We may show what an idea is like by giving *instances* of it in operation. We may show what it is unlike by showing *contrasts.* We may repeat the same idea in different forms for the sake of emphasis; this is called *iteration.* And, lastly, we may make comparisons with ideas that are analogous, by *illustration.* All ideas developed by exposition come under one or another of these heads and each method is helpful. We could very profitably spend much more time on the subject, but, tho very important, it is perhaps sufficiently plain.

7. *How to handle argument.*—Argumentation is radically different from exposition. It compares one idea with another, not to establish some likeness or unlikeness between the two, but to reveal a new idea. We can best understand the method by recalling the steps leading up to it. We have, first, experiences, and form ideas about them. Next we compare the ideas so formed, with reference as to whether they are alike or not, and form judgments. And last, we compare the judgments and from them obtain by means of argument a new kind of judgment, which is called an inference, an idea which depends for its soundness upon the soundness of the other ideas or judgments. The final judgment is called a conclusion, and the others are the reasons for it; hence the name for the final process—reasoning.

Three ways of reasoning are recognized by the authorities. The first consists in taking two truths that

have a part in common, as "All *men* are mortal" and "Socrates is a *man,*" and from these securing a third statement which, since the others are true, is necessarily true itself. "Therefore Socrates is *mortal.*" The process is called the deductive method of reasoning, because (coming from the Latin "de" and "ducere," to "lead out from") it "leads out" a "particular" truth from a "general" one.

A second mode of reasoning consists in piling up particular instances that will furnish a new general truth underlying them all. A man who has bought a certain manufacturer's goods year after year and found them meritorious, will from this argue that all the manufacturer's goods are or will be meritorious. This method of reasoning runs from the "particular" to the "general" and on that account is called *inductive.*

The third method is called reasoning by *analogy* and consists simply in inferring that what is true of one thing is true of another *like* it. Most logicians feel a preference for the first method, but the other two are in good standing.

8. *What's so and what isn't.*—When an argument is well framed and supported by evidence, the reader is swept along by it to necessary agreement. This is because logic, the science of reasoning, is based on principles of thought. These principles are immutable and eternal. We cannot think white black, or power weakness, or the greater less; our minds, while they are sound, will not have an assured fact other-

wise than it is. We may be mistaken in our perceptions and ideas, and this may lead to wrong judgments, but if the mind is sound and the perceptions true, the comparisons it makes will necessarily, if made according to principles of logic, produce perfect judgments and perfect conclusions.

9. *Weakness of language is writer's opportunity.* If words always had the same meaning, almost anybody might learn to be logical. But as we saw in a previous chapter, there is hardly a word which gives two people exactly the same idea or image, or even means the same to the same person after a lapse of time. To most people, if they thought about it, this would appear an annoying and discouraging thing, but it furnishes the business letter writer's greatest opportunity. At the cost of a little thought, which most people will not take, he learns a truth of immense practical value to him. By a little observation and reflection, in no way different from his daily observation and reflection, only more practically directed, he discovers the words that have power over other people's ideas.

Jevons, in his admirable "Elements of Logic," a book which every correspondent should at least glance thru and would do well to study, puts the matter in this way:

> There is no part of logic which is more really useful than that which treats of the ambiguity of terms, that is, of the uncertainty and variety of meanings belonging to words. Nothing indeed can be of more importance to the attainment

of correct habits of thinking and reasoning than a thoro acquaintance with the great imperfections of language.

There are various logical names given to the different kinds of ambiguity and the causes for them, but we have no need to go deeply into the matter. It is probably enough to recall to ourselves that language is growing and changing all the time. Look in the dictionary and see how many different meanings some words have. See how some have broadened in meaning while others have narrowed. Still others have dropped out and let new ones take their place. Words that were once synonyms part company and join new groups. There is a natural tendency to twist words from their old meanings, because it gives interest and brilliancy to writing. Poetry is largely made up of such changes. So is slang. The tendency is of immense help for rhetorical purposes. At the same time it presents a great danger to lucid reasoning.

10. *Common fallacies to avoid.*—In logic, errors in reasoning are called fallacies. One of the commonest, called the fallacy of equivocation, consists in the same term or word being used in two distinct senses. A writer, for example, might use the word "value" in one part of his letter to mean "market price" and in another "cost of production." The reader might not detect the fallacy, but he would probably feel something lacking in the argument and be unconvinced.

Another fallacy consists in an ambiguous structure

of sentences producing misconception: "I accomplished my business and returned the day after." Does this mean "I both accomplished my business and returned the day after" or "I accomplished my business and on the day after returned"? It may mean either.

Arguing erroneously from a general rule to a special case, where a certain accidental circumstance makes the rule inapplicable, is illustrated in an ancient example cited by Jevons: "What you bought yesterday, you eat today; you bought raw meat yesterday; therefore you eat raw meat today." The quality of "raw" was not contemplated in the first statement, only the substance of the thing bought.

The opposite of this, or arguing from a particular case to a general rule, is thus illustrated: "Wine poisons when used to excess. Many people use wine. Therefore it poisons them." Here the special circumstance of using wine "to excess" included in the first statement is left out of the second and consequently the conclusion is erroneous, and the argument unconvincing.

Arguing from one special case to another is similarly erroneous. "These goods 'went big' in New York. If you buy them, they will 'go big' here in Chicago." The argument is erroneous and unconvincing because we do not know that the conditions are the same in both cities. The reader may know they are different.

The fallacy of "irrelevant conclusion" consists in

arguing to the wrong point. We start with one idea in mind and wind up with another. This is often used intentionally by houses when their propositions are weak and need to be bolstered up. The writer apparently starts to prove, say, the value in his goods, then drifts off into an argument for other goods or the house's reputation, or some analogy, but in conclusion assumes that he has made his point. Irrelevant facts and figures are frequently lugged in to lend plausibility to such an argument. The letters and prospectuses of bogus mining and oil companies are full of examples of this kind of fallacy.

A very common fallacy is that known as "begging the question." This is the method of affirming or denying a statement instead of proving it either true or false. An instance of this might be: "I have not taken any steps to make a market for you here because I am sure it can't be done." This is "arguing in a circle," hence, not arguing at all. It dodges the question at issue. A real argument would be: "You can't break into this market without money or ideas. You haven't put any money or ideas behind this proposition. Therefore you can't break into this market with it."

Something like the fallacy previously cited is that of the "consequent," an imitation of an argument which rambles on without any real meaning.

The fallacy of the "false cause" is the last with which we need concern ourselves. This assumes something going before to be the cause of something

coming after, regardless of the fact that it may have been only one of several influences, or even no influence at all. The success of a house, for example, may be attributed to the head of the house, or to a certain policy, when the truth may be that it is due to the goods or to general conditions.

11. *Three ways of making ideas clear.*—We have now sufficiently explored the general nature of exposition and argument as means of developing clearness in ideas, and may go on to further analysis. Every letter which includes either method or both must, in order to be effectively convincing, have the following characteristics. First, everything in the letter should be to the point; the letter should have what is called *unity*. Second, all of the statements should hang together, both logically and rhetorically, each thought and sentence leading up naturally to the next; they should give the letter *coherence*. Last, what is important in thought should appear important on paper and what is subordinate in thought should appear subordinate; that is, the *emphasis* should be in the right place. These are the means of clearness in the presentation of ideas in a letter: Unity, Coherence, Emphasis.

Let us apply them, first to the letter as a whole, then to its parts.

12. *For unity, we stick to one subject.*—Unity, we agree, is obtained by limiting our attention to one subject and by developing the subject within

those limits. This is done by exposition, thru instance, contrast, iteration and illustration; and also by sound argument.

13. *For coherence, we go from known to unknown.*—Coherence comes from starting with what is known and acceptable to the reader and leading him naturally and logically without a break in the thought to the point we wish him to accept.

14. *For emphasis, we spread and repeat.*—Emphasis is secured in two ways. We may devote more thought and space to the principal point we wish to make than to any subordinate thought. Or we may put the chief thought at the end of the letter where all the logical and rhetorical forces culminate. If it has been mentioned before, we repeat it and in its clearest, most impressive way.

15. *With paragraphs, method is same.*—While a letter has a unity of its own, it is also made up of ideas, each of which needs to be explained and to be separated from other and different ideas, so that the eye in glancing over the page may quickly take up and apprehend each important point. This could not be done if the letter were one solid mass of type. To bring out Unity, Coherence and Emphasis in each of the subordinate thoughts, we split up the letter into as many corresponding parts, that is to say, we paragraph it.

Each paragraph has or should have, its own Unity, Coherence and Emphasis.

To obtain Unity in it, we put in nothing that does

not relate directly to the particular thought we wish to present.

To obtain Coherence, we see that each sentence, besides being intelligible, shall look back to and link up with the sentence preceding it and at the same time look forward to and prepare the way for the sentence coming after, as in the paragraph we are now reading. If the sentence happens to be the opening one of a letter, then the indispensable something to which it must look back and link up is an idea already existing in the reader's mind, one that is of the "known and acceptable" type, personal and individual if possible, but not necessarily weak for being general. Plenty of illustrations of both kinds may be found in the letters scattered thru this book.

To secure Emphasis in the paragraph we use two devices, one being to give the leading idea more space than we do the lesser thought and the other to give it the commanding position. By giving it more space we hold the reader's mind for a longer time and let the idea sink in deeper. By putting it in the best place we make the impression sharper.

Both devices are important, but both are not equally appreciated by writers. It is natural to talk at greater length about big points than about little ones and we can without much trouble turn that tendency into a habit. But in talking, which is more natural than writing, very few of us stop to arrange our ideas for emphasis. We accentuate by stress of voice, facial expression or gesture. This cannot be

done on paper. Instead, we may underscore the important words, or put them in capitals, tho these are not to be recommended as frequent practices. We can get more real emphasis in a written paragraph by "massing" it, which means apportioning to each thought its proper space and place. The ability to do the latter does not come to us naturally. We have to acquire it, but it is by all means worth getting.

Where is the important place in a paragraph? The glance of course first falls on the opening line. But is this a decisive test? In a story, a poem, a drama, the important part is the climax. The mind in motion naturally moves toward a conclusion. Why, then, should not this be also true in a paragraph; why should the end not be the important place where the emphasis naturally falls and where we must arrange to put our most important thought? Undoubtedly, it is.

16. *Paragraphs are of three kinds.*—There appear to be three kinds of paragraphs. Some letters, like some compositions, run on from start to finish so loosely connected that we might chop them into parts almost anywhere, according to convenience. Each paragraph treats a more or less complete thought or phase of the subject, not so completely or logically, to be sure, as if the writer had planned his paragraphs, but still with some semblance of completeness.

Until very recently, few writers of literature ever wrote any other kind of paragraph, or we should

rather say, any other kind of short paragraph, because the old-time writers generally employed the same pains in "massing" the thought in their paragraphs that some modern writers are using in the short paragraphs we nowadays prefer. The old-fashioned paragraph was a very long one. It was almost an essay in itself. With changing times, it gradually shortened. This was first done merely by cutting it up into lengths. Now we have reawakened to the fact that we can treat each of the short lengths in the way the old writers treated the long ones and thus increase the number of points of emphasis.

17. *When paragraph is periodic.*—The planned-paragraph idea has two branchings. The theory common to both is that each paragraph shall treat one phase of the general subject from one point of view. The first sentence indicates what this is, and in what direction the thought shall move. It states the "known" and takes a first step toward the "unknown" end. It works toward that end always. Every successive sentence leads the mind or, better still, lets it race, from fact to fact and argument to argument, with increasing comprehension and interest, to an inevitable and satisfying conclusion.

If this is done simply, and the thought, like a wave, rolls up to a higher and higher crest, then the crest, just before it curls and breaks, is like the paragraph's conclusion. That is one way of writing the paragraph. The thought moves on, as in the first kind

of a paragraph; the difference is that it moves on to a culmination that is planned. Professor Barrett Wendell considers that the more definitely it is planned the greater its effect on the mind of the reader. He suggests a formula: A good paragraph can be condensed into a single sentence of which its subject shall be that of the paragraph's opening sentence and its predicate the closing sentence. Our previous paragraph, for example, might be reduced, by the formula, to this simple sentence: "The planned-paragraph idea . . . is to let the reader's mind race from fact to fact, etc., to an inevitable and satisfying conclusion."

18. *Paragraphs that analyze and repeat.*—The other variation of the planned type of paragraph comes out plump in the first sentence with the whole story of the paragraph. Instead of first pointing the way and then adding thought to thought until we reach a conclusion previously unstated and perhaps unforeseen, it starts with what would otherwise have been the conclusion and then proceeds to explain or amplify it. Where the other type worked toward a main thought, this type first states it and then works away from it. To bring it back at the close it repeats the main thought in substance, adding the emphasis of repetition to that of position. The present paragraph, as we may see on rereading it, illustrates this type, which might very well borrow the formula used by the old preacher for a sermon: "First you tell 'em

what you're going to say, then you say it, and then you tell 'em what you said."

19. *Triple-telling type the favorite.*—Probably most good writing, in letters and outside of them, affects this last type of paragraph more than either of the other kinds.

20. *To plan or not to plan.*—We may sum up by saying that if a man writes or dictates under a real rush of ideas and the expression is so identified with his thought and feeling that he cannot better it by planning, then evidently he should not try to do so. He has the effect desired; and tinkering with the inspiration may spoil it. But nine times out of ten there is no inspiration; only an idea to be worked out. In this case, it will probably save a great deal of time and add tremendously to the effectiveness of the letter to organize the paragraphs.

## REVIEW

What is the difference between conviction and persuasion?

What methods do you use in convincing a reader? What in persuading him?

Which do you use most in your own letters?

Why are both methods generally necessary?

How does exposition differ from argument?

Give one example of a valid argument.

What is a fallacy? How does it differ from a mistake? Mention and explain a few common fallacies.

What three methods are used to make ideas clear in the letter as a whole and in each paragraph?

# CHAPTER XX

## GETTING THE MOST OUT OF WORDS (*Continued*)

1. *Sentences should have Unity, Coherence, Emphasis.*—What we found true in regard to paragraphs is also, with a difference, true of sentences. Here, in the same way, clearness of ideas is to be obtained by Unity, Coherence and Emphasis.

A sentence should express just one thought. Something is, or does, or is acted upon; that is enough to put in one sentence.

Coherence, the second quality of clearness, is obtained by having each word right and having it in the right place. The words must make sense, and the sentence, too. Thoughts that naturally belong together should be kept together and those that make confusion should be kept apart. If we start talking about one thing, we should complete the thought. We should not jump from one thing to another and then back to the first, then add something we overlooked, and so on. We need not illustrate these simple matters of composition, which all of us presumably have considered at least once in our lives. Any reader whose recollections on the subject are hazy should get a good text book on business English and brush up. Here we have space only for a few references to the less understood matters of rhetoric.

Each sentence should show the clear connection with the one before it. This sentence, for example, is connected with the previous one by the word "This" and, "for example." This expedient of pointing back keeps our thoughts on the rails. It often shows us, too, how we can improve the preceding sentence so as to make the thought clear and continuous.

Emphasis, last of all, is secured by getting the main thought in the important place. This place may be the beginning of the sentence, but more often is the end. This is because normally we start a sentence looking backward, as this sentence does with the word "this," and then develop the thought forward; the last words convey the newest thought; and it is the new, not the old, that we wish to emphasize.

2. *Sentence either "loose" or periodic.*—Right here enters an important consideration—the type of sentence. Paragraphs, we found, were of several kinds. One kind worked to a carefully planned conclusion. Another stated the "conclusion" first and then explained it. We find the two types repeated in sentences. One kind, which leaves us in doubt as to exactly what it is going to say until we reach its conclusion, is the "periodic" type. The sentence just read illustrates that type. The "loose" type of sentence, on the other hand, tells the whole story in the opening clause, and tho we may add another clause or two, as in this sentence, they only expand and do not complete the thought.

We talk ordinarily in "loose" sentences. A long,

loose sentence is, in fact, hardly more than a number of short sentences strung together. Most of the sentences in the letters we have printed are loose sentences. We shall do well to master both types and mix them in the proportion indicated, if for no other purpose than to avoid sameness of style.

Sameness may also be avoided by making our sentences neither all long nor all short, but mixing the lengths. Short sentences are easy to read. We understand them at a glance. But too many of these tire us. They are like short steps. Or the jounces of a springless car. It is a positive relief to swing out occasionally into a longer flowing sentence that breaks the monotony of their rhythm. Many long sentences are, of course, as tiresome as too many short ones. A very good plan in general is to make the first and last sentences of our paragraphs reasonably short, and those in the middle fairly long. We thus get under way with easy reading and close with a snap.

The authorities say that good paragraphs may be planned, but that good sentences come only by rewriting. In thinking and writing fast, we get our words down on paper in the order in which they come to us. The order generally is not the clearest or most forceful. We can improve it by shifting words, phrases and clauses about until the sentence says exactly what we intended it to mean and in the most striking way.

3. *Words that point and words that hint.*—Still

considering the means of securing clearness in the expression of ideas, we reach the subject of words. Here we have to change our method of analysis. Sentences and paragraphs can be taken apart and put together in different ways, but not words. Suppose we look at them from the point of view of utility. They are used, roughly speaking, in two ways, one to mean what they say, the other to mean more. Suppose we wrote:

Other dealers in your line have found our proposition very interesting and had wonderful results from it.

Compare that with the following:

Seven hundred dealers in photographic supplies stocked at the first call of our salesmen—and within ninety days over 80 per cent of them had reordered, in double quantities.

The second sentence is undoubtedly more attention-getting. The improvement was secured by taking out the almost meaningless words, "other," "interesting" and "wonderful results," and substituting the facts. The new words are all plain words, meaning exactly what they say. They denote specific ideas and are called *denotative* words.

Suppose there was another paragraph in the same letter reading:

The profit of 100 per cent offered you is unusual. How many other articles afford such an opportunity for combining quick and large gains? Let us demonstrate to you the truth of this with a trial order.

Then read this:

100 per cent profit and quick turns! You don't see many propositions like that coming down the street. Are you from Missouri? We hope so, because that means you'll want to be "shown!"

This may not be any better selling talk than the first example, but it is much easier to read and therefore stands a better chance of being considered. One reason is that there are two expressions, "from Missouri" and "shown," that suggest a good deal more than they say, and two others, "quick turns" and "coming down the street," that give an atmosphere, one of brisk business and the other of quick humor. Words that suggest are said to connote meanings; they are called *connotative* words. All figurative and allusive words are connotations.

4. *Why plain words are safest.*—The nature of the last quoted paragraph suggests a word of warning. There are two dangers in the use of connotation for the sake of clearness. Some such words incline to slang and flightiness. Others suggest poetic fancy. It is ordinarily safe to talk about "getting down to brass tacks" or the "meat in the cocoanut," "turning things inside out"—all connotative words and expressions—but the greater part of the time it is still safer to make use of as few of them as possible and hold instead to plain denotative words.

Strictly speaking, the distinction between denotation and connotation is largely an artificial one. Al-

most every precise word has its atmosphere of other meanings. A word that is denotative to us may be connotative to the reader as, for example, a reference to "his family." His family means little or nothing to us, but to him it means everything.

There is an opening sentence in a bank's letter, reproduced in Chapter II, that is a model for the purpose:

> We believe that some of our depositors have not considered the fact that it is necessary for an account to have an average balance sufficiently large to cover the expense of carrying it.

Every word in this sentence is needed to make the sense desired. Every word is precise. These two qualities give the expression its crystal clearness. Supposing it had been written this way:

> We have been making an investigation into the cost of carrying individual accounts and have discovered that quite a number of our very good friends have failed, of course thru inadvertence, to maintain an average balance sufficiently large to cover the expense of carrying it.

The superiority of the first version over the second is not due to its greater brevity, but primarily to the fact that it excludes the unimportant matters of "investigation," "inadvertence," and "friendship" which have nothing to do with the matter and to that extent cumber the sense, and substitutes the exact "we believe" and "depositors." The good version is the simple version and it may be laid down as a rule with exceedingly few exceptions that all effective business

writing is simple writing. Many a business man would reach a style of natural forcefulness if he would only let himself go in the direction of common sense and simplicity and not strain after some delusive elegance or "punch."

5. *Anglo-Saxon or Latin roots?*—Broadly speaking, we shall do well to stick as close as may be to short words of Anglo-Saxon root. We cannot use them wholly. Most if not all of the words in this short space of printing are of such kind—from them we may see how the search for understanding and power by this means alone makes the writing seem more strained than does the puffed-up wording it tries to shun.

Good style, we shall have to admit, takes in both words of Anglo-Saxon and those of Latin derivation. Abraham Lincoln, whose letters and speeches are often cited as models of clearness and force, used both and was understood. "Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this *continent* a new *nation conceived* in *liberty* and *dedicated* to the *proposition* that all men are *created equal.*" The italicized words are of Latin origin. "Conceived" and "dedicated" are still a little "highbrow," but the other words are as commonly used and understood as almost any Anglo-Saxon word. Lincoln got under way quickly with simple, unreflective Anglo-Saxon, but when he came to express the complex thoughts represented by the italicized words he could do nothing else than turn to Latin. Don't let us deceive

ourselves. Good words are words that the reader understands, whatever their root. It is safer as a general thing to lean as far as we can toward the old Anglo-Saxon stock of homely, every-day words, but we should not be stampeded; the sensible thing always is to use the word that fits.

6. *Images for persuasion.*—We found that in order to win over the reader we have not only to convince his intellect but persuade his emotions and that while the way to do the former is by supplying ideas, the way to do the latter is by furnishing or suggesting images or mental pictures. The idea, we said, should be clear, in order to be understood. The object of the image, however, is not understanding, but feeling —to stimulate interest and desire, from which eventually will come decision and action. We could with a little forcing of the sense discuss images from the point of view of Unity, Coherence and Emphasis, but it is probably better to let those terms stand as identified with ideas, and for images take other names.

7. *Vivid images are concrete images.*—The first requisite of vividness in the kind of images we are at present discussing, that is, images pictured for a commercial purpose, is *Concreteness,* which means, as we learned, not merely a substantial general reality, but reality that is personal to the reader—"close-up" reality. In painting the picture that we are to present to the reader, we choose, of all words, those that will most characteristically, most naturally, to him, make the picture real. They must not be strange

words, mystifying technical terms, exaggerations, inaccuracies. The picture is to be built up out of the words just as a painted picture is built up out of paint, and to see new and strange words, or old words strangely used, is as confusing as it is to see the color splashed on the canvas in huge daubs—we cannot see the picture for the paint.

8. *For vivid images, choose interpretive words.*—Since the image is not an end in itself, but only a means to something else, which is a sale, or perhaps a collection, it must not be a mere wordy sketch; it must be colored to a certain extent with our emotion in order to be able to make the reader feel about it as we do. Our words therefore must be selected with a view to interpretation; they must be *Interpretive* words.

Remember that the word-picture we put on paper is not at all the picture that the reader sees in his mind. His picture is made up out of his own experience. Situation, detail, colors, people, all are different from our own. Our task is to say just enough to summon up that picture in his mind. A few right words will "talk him into" it—too many will "talk him out of it."

Take that letter written by a prisoner, the letter in Chapter VIII. It was an important part of the prisoners' selling campaign to rouse the public's sympathetic interest in their condition. They could not ask for interest or appear to be seeking to make capital out of their situation. They had to make the idea

understood, however, and the best and only way to do it was thru a few words that would spring a picture in their readers' minds. None of us had to know anything about that particular prison; each of us thought of his own kind of prison. The only words used in the letter are "fellow inmates" and later "right here behind the walls." What more was called for? Enough is enough—more would have made it mawkish and repellant.

9. *For vivid images, movement.*—But word-images may be both concrete and interpretive and still fall short of attaining the utmost in vividness. There is one more quality to be considered. Unless we know the kind of elements that make the strongest appeal in a mental picture we cannot be sure of including them. Words may call up pictures, but what if the subject is "still life," motionless, dead! Compare the attendance at art galleries and at the moving pictures and draw your own conclusions. What most appeals to people is life, action, sights and sounds—something happening. The third ingredient of vivid imagery is *Movement.*

For illustration, let us take a paragraph out of the letter to a traveling salesman, given on page 181. The first three lines contain only ideas. There is no image until we come to the fourth line. See how the word "buck," with its associations of the Wild West, circus and football, suddenly makes the letter vital. Then in the concluding lines of the paragraph, "There are times when he'd sell his job for two cents

and consider it a good bargain." That is Concrete and Interpretive, to be sure, but its chief characteristic is Movement.

The conclusion is that after we have thought up a picture, put it into concrete expression and weeded out all words that do not make for vividness, there is still a gain to be achieved by going thru the letter and changing all the "still-life" words into moving pictures, by using comparisons, illustrations, and figures of speech, in short, the emotional ways of speaking and writing we all fall into when we are moved to pleasure or admiration.

10. *Power of plain words over imagination and emotions.*—With images also, as with ideas, we have the choice of two ways of using words, of using them in one way to mean exactly what they say and using them another way to suggest and involve something in addition. It is a singular and most interesting state of affairs. When we were talking about ideas, we found that the plain words known as denotative words often tell more and give clearer and more definite ideas than the connotative words. And now, when it is the calling up of images we desire, we find that for this purpose, too, the plainest, least figurative and poetic words are the most powerful.

The explanation is simple. To each of us the romance of our own feelings is infinitely more interesting and moving than the general romance, and the key that unlocks it is almost invariably a word with plain, particular meaning, not one with general asso-

ciations. In order to remind people strongly of what they love, and thus move them, we do not have to rhapsodize; all that is necessary is to name the things. To go further and indulge in flowery speeches would be to spoil the vivid pictures of which their minds are full. Emotion comes so easily in response to the right signal that there is great danger in overdoing it. A writer with real imagination will stop in time.

So that it all comes to this: in order to secure clearness in the ideas that convince, let us use words that exactly describe what we mean, and to secure vividness in the images that persuade, let us also use words that are exact and specific. In both cases they are denotative words, only one set will refer to business or the immediate matter in hand, while the other will tap the reader's inner life and longings. The words we use will be denotative; the other man will supply the all-important connotations.

11. *Read the best English.*—In closing, let us turn back from these more or less ponderous but unavoidable matters of rhetoric and the like to the more human aspects of our subject. Theory is necessary, but something more is needed to make a good letter writer. Even practice, no matter how faithful or intelligent, is not enough. The man who wants to be a first class business correspondent must be acquainted with the best thought of the times and of the world. This can only be done, or best done, by wide reading. To quote a popular writer in regard to the matter:—"You should not be content to read business books alone, and

novels and short stories. The more you immerse yourself in the work of the great writers of good virile English, the broader and more accurate your vocabulary will become and the more vigorous your style."

Benjamin Franklin's account of his endeavors to master the power of language cannot be quoted too often:

> At this time I met with an odd volume of the "Spectator." I have never before seen any of them. I bought it, read it over and over, and was much delighted with it. I thought the writing excellent, and wished if possible to imitate it. With that view I took some of the papers, and making short hints of the sentiments in each sentence, laid them by a few days, and then, without looking at the book, tried to complete the papers again, by expressing each hinted sentiment at length, and as fully as it had been expressed before, in any suitable words that should occur to me. Then I compared my "Spectator" with the original, discovered some of my faults, and corrected them. But I found I wanted a stock of words or a readiness in recollecting and using them, which I thought I should have acquired before that time if I had gone on making verses; since the continual search for words of the same import, but of different length to suit the measure or of different sound for the rhyme, would have laid me under a constant necessity of searching for variety, and also have tended to fix that variety in my mind and make me master of it. Therefore I took some of the tales in the "Spectator" and turned them into verse: and after a time, when I had pretty well forgotten the prose, turned them back again.

12. *Be sincere.*—Just as it is well to keep constantly before you the parallel truths that a stream

can rise no higher than its source and that a letter can be no better than the mind from which it comes, so also you will want to single out for special emphasis in your memory one mental quality that is indispensable to permanent success, one that we have touched upon again and again, to which the whole Text bears tribute—the quality of downright sincerity. No doubt some of the other elements that have been cited are equally vital, but doubtless, too, you will never be so tempted to minimize them as you will be at times to overlook or slight sincerity. We are still speaking of business, remember, and not primarily of ethics. And from this point of view let us quote one who has had a great deal of experience in writing:

> The average reader of a letter or article or book has a certain sixth sense for detecting insincerity. No writer can afford to take chances with that sixth sense. The writer who says: "Of course neither I nor my friends would 'fall for' the proposition in this letter, but it will 'go great' in the rural districts," will probably be disappointed in the returns, no matter how attractive the offer may be.
>
> "F. P. A." [the paragrapher] has an epigram to this effect: "The average reader is considerably above the average;" by which he means that all of us who sell the public are too prone to assume that the average of taste and discrimination and intelligence is somewhat lower than in the circles in which we ourselves move.
>
> Nothing has helped me more in writing than the picture of one definite family—my father's family as it used to gather around the breakfast table. The morning mail would arrive usually before the meal was over and he would read it while we ate, commenting on the letters, sometimes aloud. I like

to think of *my* business letters arriving at that breakfast table and being read aloud. I like to ask myself as I prepare to write: Is the proposition advanced in this letter one that would be likely to appeal to my father? Is the offer made one that could attract my mother? Or my brothers? If it is not, then I think it is dangerous to assume that *other* mothers and sisters and brothers will find it engaging. At least if I am going to make a mistake I should like to make it in over-estimating rather than in under-estimating the intelligence of the people to whom I write.

13. *First and last, the reader's interest.*—Thus we find ourselves back at the place from which we started; the real secret of effectiveness in letter writing is to see the proposition thru the eyes of the reader and perform the service of informing him and helping him to make up his mind. All that we have discussed in the Text amounts to little more than this. The mechanics of letter writing is of value when it assists that purpose. The real power of convincing and persuading comes, as we must remind ourselves over and over again, not out of mere word juggling, but out of living, out of thinking and feeling. Even the best of instruction does not get far without the moral and spiritual cooperation of the writer. A month's reading in even the best of textbooks is only a signpost to the secret of success in letter writing. We must know human nature, and respect it. We must know that part of it peculiarly which we have chosen for our customers; we must know them, and all about them, as much as we can; must like them, take an interest in them and to the best of our ability

serve them. With this knowledge and sympathy and in addition a share of good sense, honesty and the smallest knack of writing, it is not humanly possible for our letters, as a whole, to fail.

## REVIEW

Explain how the principles of unity, coherence and emphasis govern in the composition of sentences as well as of paragraphs and of letters.

Study some of your recent letters and see how far you have observed these principles of clearness in writing sentences.

See how many of your sentences are loose and how many periodic; also, how many are short and how many long.

Why is it a good plan to use all kinds and mix them?

What is the advantage of using specific or denotative words?

What is meant by "images" in composition?

What is their effect on the mind of the reader?

What gives vividness to images?

What kind of image-making words have the most power?

Note: Numerous questions of business practice and procedure are discussed in detail in the Modern Business Reports. The current list will show those which are especially related to this volume. Among them may be mentioned:

99. How to write an Engineering Report.

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